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SHORT SERMONS

FOR ALL THE SUNDAYS OF THE YEAR.

BY

REV. FRANCIS HUNOLT, S.J.

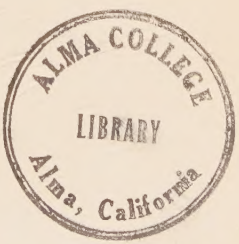
TRANSLATED, MODERNIZED, CONDENSED, ARRANGED, AND ADAPTED

BY

REV. AUGUSTINE WIRTH, O.S.B.

VOL. III.

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN.



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FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE HAPPINESS OF HIM WHO PUTS HIS CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

"*But when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand.*" *Luke* 21 : 28.

Terrible will be the coming of our Lord to judge the living and the dead. There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars that will fill the world with terror. The powers of heaven will be moved, and the sea will send forth a mighty roaring. All the peoples of the earth will be stricken with fear and consternation. And in those terrible circumstances we are encouraged to rejoice and lift up our heads towards heaven with an assured confidence that our redemption is at hand. Yes, truly, says our Lord ; even in those terrible circumstances you, my faithful servants, must rejoice. Even when the wicked are pining away for fear, "lift up your heads ;" then must your joy and hope be all the greater ; then must you look forward to your redemption with still greater confidence. If we always kept in the friendship of God, and if we had, moreover, a lively hope and confidence in him, how much trouble, anxiety, and sorrow we should avoid ! We often sigh and groan under the miseries of this wretched life ; wherever we turn we find hundreds of dangers and necessities of soul and body. Ah, only serve your God ! Have confidence in your God ! Therefore, if we wish to be happy,

I. Let us not trust in man, but
II. Let us live piously and trust in God.

I. Although Christian hope aims chiefly at the invisible and spiritual goods that we confidently expect from God in the necessities of the soul, yet this hope can and must also be extended to temporal goods. Hence we can and should hope and trust to be

preserved from temporal calamities, or to be freed from them if we are actually suffering them. It is of this latter hope that I now intend to speak. Happy is the man who in all temporal necessities puts his whole hope and confidence in God. For, where can I better place my confidence than in him who, as I know for certain, will console me in my troubles if I fly to him for refuge? Now, such a person as that must have two things: first, he must have the power, and, secondly, the will to help me. If one of these be wanting, my confidence is badly placed; nor shall I be able to find the help I hoped for. Thus, if in poverty I were to put my trust in a poor workingman, who has hardly enough to keep himself and his family from starving, and to look to his help to become rich, every one would say that my hope is a foolish one. His will may be good, but he wants the power of making me rich. On the other hand, if I were to place this firm confidence in a rich man who is a noted miser, and never gives anything to the poor, my hope would again be an ill-founded one; he is able, of course; but the will is wanting. Hence both are required, *the power* and *the will*, to make my hope and confidence assured.

1. Now, my dear brethren, *we can find hardly any one on earth in whom we can thus trust, since men are wanting either in the power or in the will to help us, or even in both.* For, no matter how great may be the power that some possess, it still remains a limited one, dependent, defective, which weakens itself by rendering assistance to others. What I give to another I take away from myself, and so make myself unable to give as much in future. The powerful ones of this earth are kings, princes, and sovereigns; but they are still only men, that is, if they have power, they are not almighty; and therefore David warns us: "*Put not your trust in princes, in the children of men, in whom there is no salvation*" (Ps. 144:23). Right was the answer given by king Joram to the widow who appealed to him for help in the famine. "Save me, my lord, O king," she said; and he said: "If the Lord doth not save thee, how can I save thee?" (4. Kings 6:26, 27.)

2. And even when the good will to help is found amongst men, it is very inconstant and changeable, and is little to be relied on. A sour look, an incautious word, may deprive you of your seemingly best and most faithful friend. The promises and offers of service that people make are mostly empty compliments, uttered in the spirit of worldly policy. When the hour of need comes, those fine words vanish into thin air. You entrust a matter of importance to some one who is under an obligation to you, and who has offered his services; you rely on his ability, but hardly are you gone a few steps away from him, when he forgets you; *out of sight, out of mind.* When Joseph was in prison in Egypt, he told Pharao's butler that he would soon be reinstated in his former position, and begged of him to say a good word to the king for him. Joseph's prophecy was fulfilled; after three days the butler was restored. Truly, it would seem that Joseph had now good reason to hope for a speedy release; but days, weeks, months, nay, two whole years passed by, and Joseph was still in prison. Was it perhaps because the butler's prayer had no influence on the king? No; but when he regained his freedom he forgot all about Joseph. So little reliance is to be placed on the promises of men. And even if they do not forget, they still often refuse to help when they could do so, because it might cost them some trouble, or expose them to danger if they kept their word. When Sedecias was besieged by the Chaldeans in Jerusalem, he expected Pharao, king of Egypt, to help him, and asked him to send at once as many soldiers as possible to his assistance. Pharao set out rather late, but when he saw the army of Nabuchodonosor, he was afraid to risk his soldiers' lives against it, and went back, while Nabuchodonosor continued the siege. Jerusalem was taken and plundered, and Sedecias, after his eyes were put out, was led captive into Babylon.

Such is the way of the world; every one seeks his own advantage, and even those whom you think your best friends will deceive, betray, and abandon you if they find their own interest at stake. Even if there is one or another who has both the power

and the will to help, he can use it only in a very limited way and in certain circumstances; there is no human power able to help in every necessity and danger. Thus, my dear brethren, it is to no purpose that we rely on men, and no one can esteem himself happy merely because he has many rich and powerful friends and patrons.

II. God alone has power to rule everything in the world.

1. Therefore, place all your hope and confidence in him.

On him alone you can fully rely, for it is on God alone that our happiness or misery, our prosperity or adversity, depends. He is the almighty and sovereign Lord of all created things, who can dispose of them all according to his will and pleasure. Everything that happens on earth (sin alone excepted), happens solely because his all-wise providence has so ordained and not otherwise. "Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God" (Ecclus. 11: 14).

2. He has also the will to help those who trust in him.

We are children of God; he is our Father. Is it possible that such a Father does not wish to help his children, who love him with all their hearts, trust in him completely, resign themselves entirely to him, and call upon him in their necessities? Can the promises of a faithful and infallible God be broken? promises that he has so often and so clearly renewed, assuring us that he is willing to help those who trust in him? Are not these words clear enough, "*Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me*"? (Ps. 49: 15.) "Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you" (Matt. 11: 28). "Casting all your care upon him, for he hath care of you" (1. Pet. 5: 7). Does he not say often enough: Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and

the door shall be opened to you? "for every one that seeketh, findeth" (Matt. 7 : 7, 8). Is not this enough to convince us that God has an earnest will to help in all his necessities him who trusts in his providence?

God cries out, *not once*, but *a hundred times*: Come to me, all you; ask, and you shall receive. Hope in me, and I will save you. Whatever you ask, only have confidence, and you will obtain it. These are the words of God, who is almighty and can keep his promise; of God, who is infinitely good and has the will to keep it; of God, who is infinitely faithful and must necessarily keep it; and yet we cannot be persuaded to put our whole confidence and hope in him! What, *in God's name*, is the cause of that? Ah, nothing else but the want of a lively faith, on which hope is grounded. We do not believe firmly; we do not bring before our minds undoubtingly and in lively colors the almighty power, goodness, and faithfulness of God, and therefore we are so often despondent. How many of us do not deserve the reproof that our Lord gave to St. Peter when he was on the point of sinking into the waves: "O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt"? If we are suddenly overtaken by some calamity, what sighs and lamentations, what fears and despondency we give way to! And if the first "Our Father" we say has no effect, how slothfully we say the second, thinking that all will be of no avail. O thou of little faith, why dost thou doubt? You do not believe as you ought, and therefore your hope sinks to the ground.

Read the history of the patient Job. It is well-known into what poverty, misery, and desolation that pious man fell; how he was robbed of all his property, and infected with an ulcer that covered his body from head to foot, so that he had to sit on a dunghill and scrape away the matter that was flowing from his sores; yet he not only regained his former wealth, health, and prosperity, but received from the Lord twice as much as he had before. Why? Because in all his troubles and sufferings he never lost for a moment his confidence in God. Hear what he himself says: "Although he should kill me, I will trust in him" (Job

13 : 15). By which he means to say : If God were to afflict me to such an extent that death was already before my eyes, yet my confidence in him would not be lessened, but I would still continue to hope that he would preserve my life.

Happy, then, he who places his hope in God with a firm confidence ! "Blessed be the man, that trusteth in the Lord, and the Lord shall be his confidence. And he shall be as a tree that is planted by the waters, that spreadeth out its roots towards moisture : and it shall not fear when the heat cometh. And the leaf thereof shall be green, and in the time of drought it shall not be solicitous, neither shall it cease at any time to bring forth fruit" (Jer. 17 : 7, 8). There you have a lively picture of the Christian who loves God, has confidence in him, and in the time of necessity calls on him for help. Blessed will that man be in heaven and on earth; blessed amongst men on earth;blessed by the Angels in heaven and the elect of God ; blessed by the sovereign God himself, whose help and grace he is assured of whenever he wishes. "In thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded" (Ps. 30 : 2). Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

WE MUST PLACE OUR CONFIDENCE IN GOD ALONE.

"*Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?*" *Matt.* 11: 3.

What answer did Christ make to this question ? "Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again." This should suffice to show that I, and no other, am the Messias ; for it is only by the almighty power of God that such miracles can be wrought. My dear brethren, we have an almighty God, whose least sign all creatures must obey ; who alone can free us from all our necessities and sorrows, and who has given his

promise to help those who put their confidence in him and call upon him. *Therefore we should place all our hope and trust in him*, and indeed in him alone; for there is no other who has the same power and good will to help us that he has. But now I imagine I hear some exclaim: Yes, but I have now been hoping and trusting for such a long time; I have prayed and sighed so often, but I am none the better for it all; I am just as badly off as I was at the beginning. Now do you know why you have not been helped? I will tell you:

I. You were expecting assistance from some one else;
II. You did not place your hope and confidence in God alone.

I. God wishes us to use our diligence and the natural means we may have at hand to avert calamities, but in such a way as not to place our hopes of safety in those human means, but in God alone; for he alone has given those means the power of helping us, and without his assistance all our efforts would be fruitless. The sick man must not ascribe his restoration to health to the doctor, the tradesman or man of business must not attribute to his own industry the success that has crowned his efforts; no, the success is to be attributed to God alone. For, as St. Paul says: "Neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1. Cor. 3: 7).

1. A proof that we do not place our confidence in God alone is the fact that in impending calamities our first thoughts are directed to what we can effect by our own industry or by the help of others; and if we see that we can do little or nothing, then, more through despair than through child-like confidence, we appeal to God by prayer as the last resource. Thus you may hear some sick people sighing forth, after they have spent months and years in bed: Alas, I have done everything now, but all is of no avail! I see that I must try something else, and rely on God; he will be my best friend after all. Thus God is made the last resource

in an emergency. Ah, unhappy we, exclaims St. Bernard with indignation: Why do we hesitate to cast away all miserable, vain, useless, and deceitful hopes, so that we may place our confidence in him who alone can and will help us?

2. The weakness of our hope in God is shown when we experience no relief nor help after having prayed and made use of natural means. Then we lose heart at once, and if we are encouraged or consoled either publicly in sermons, or by inward spiritual inspirations; if we are told to continue praying, to hope in the Lord, and not lose confidence in him, we often think with a sort of chagrin: Yes, no doubt prayer is good; hope is good; confidence in God is good; but! And what do you mean by that wretched "but"? Nothing else than that you are wanting in true hope and confidence in God, as if he either could not or would not help you. And can you imagine that such a weak faith as that will move the Lord God to assist you?

Now, the very reason why there is neither help nor consolation for you, and why God does not hear you, is that you do not fly to him with a real confidence; you do not trust in God alone; you rely more, or at least in the first place, on creatures, on your own industry, on human means; and therefore, I repeat, God does not and will not help you. Read the holy Scriptures, and you will see that, as a general rule, he abandons those who put their trust in men.

Naaman, one of the richest and most influential princes of Syria, was infected with a loathsome leprosy. Physicians vied with one another in their efforts to relieve him, but to no purpose; until at last Naaman acted on the advice of a servant maid, dismissed the physicians, and went to see Eliseus, the prophet of God. The prophet told him to wash seven times in the Jordan. Hardly had he done so, when "his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was made clean" (4. Kings 5:14). Who made Naaman a leper? It was God. Why did he not cure him before? Because Naaman trusted too much in the skill of men. God wished

to show him that help and counsel can be had only from the Lord, and therefore that we should place our hope in God alone in all our necessities. And Naaman acknowledged this after he was made clean. "In truth, I know," said he, "there is no other God in all the earth, but only in Israel" (4. Kings 5 : 15), from whom alone we must expect help.

Even the most faithful servants of God have sometimes been left quite desolate when they placed their confidence anywhere except in the Lord. Well known is the innocence of Joseph ; how obedient and respectful he was to his father Jacob ; what a sincere love he had for his brothers, wicked as they were, and how angelic he was in his purity, which he kept untarnished in the midst of the most violent temptations and allurements,—all virtues that are most dear to the heart of God. Yet he was falsely accused as an adulterer, thrown into prison, bound with chains, and kept there for some years without hope or help, although no doubt he often called on God during the time, for he loved God with his whole heart. There you have an example of a just and innocent man, abandoned, as it were, by God in the most dreadful misfortune. Ah, that is truly the case, would the wisdom of the world say ; unhappy Joseph, of what good to you now is that virtue and piety with which you so earnestly strove to gain the favor of God ? He now leaves you in the lurch. If you had obeyed your mistress, you would have been secure of her protection, and would fare much better than you now do in that wretched prison. See now how vain and idle your hope is. Oh, foolish reasoning of the senseless world ! Cannot the God of infinite power deliver one who puts his trust in him from the gloomy dungeon ? Cannot the Almighty place even a slave on the throne, if he pleases ? And such was in reality what he did for Joseph. Yet I cannot help thinking with astonishment : Why did the wise, almighty, and faithful God allow innocence to languish in a dungeon for such a long time ? Why did he not liberate his beloved Joseph long before ? Do you wish to know the reason ? It was because Joseph had not deserved to be freed before ; because he had not placed all his

confidence in God. How was that ? Joseph had prophesied to the chief butler of Pharao that he would soon be liberated and be restored to his former position ; and then thought to himself : Now is my chance ; now I shall have some one to intercede for me. "Only remember me," said he to the chief butler, "when it shall be well with thee, and do me the kindness to put Pharao in mind to take me out of this prison ; for I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here without any fault was cast into the dungeon " (Gen. 40 : 14, 15). Hear what Joseph desires ; his wish now is to be helped by men ; but for that very reason God will justly refuse to help him. Now, Joseph, so does the Lord seem to address him, do you hope and rely on men, as if my providence alone were not enough to save you ? You will see, then, what it is to put your trust in men. For the butler, once things prospered with him, forgot all about his promise, and the unlucky Joseph had to remain some years still in prison, through a decree of divine providence, because he had relied too much on human help. But when at last Joseph, having found his hopes frustrated, no longer relied on men, but trusted in God alone, how did things go with him then ? From being a prisoner and a slave, he became viceroy of Egypt.

II. God has promised his help and assistance only to those who trust in him alone. "Because he hath hoped in me," he says by the Psalmist, "I will deliver him ; I will protect him because he hath known my name" (Ps. 90 : 14). To encourage us to this undivided confidence, our Lord gives us a beautiful exhortation when speaking to those timid and pusillanimous people who are always in dread lest the necessary food and clothing should be wanting to them. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow : they labor not, neither do they spin ;" and yet the Lord clothes them with a snow-white and beautiful garment, that no art can imitate, so that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed as one of them. "How much more you, O ye of little faith !" (Matt. 6 : 28, 29.) How much more readily will not your heavenly Father provide for those who trust in him ?

King David understood this well, when he said to the Lord: "Give us help from trouble, for vain is the salvation of man." The forces of the Syrians, the Ammonites, and the Idumeans had united against David, and were prepared to attack him. He had an army powerful enough to resist all those foes, and generals who had been always victorious, and so could have easily hoped for a complete victory; yet he did not think himself justified in trusting his army. My soldiers, he thought, are indeed not used to flee before the enemy; they have been always victorious hitherto; but still they are only mortals, and can easily fall into disorder and be vanquished. If I, then, put my trust in them, I shall run the risk of finding myself disappointed; but if I trust in my God, I can be certain that I shall not be overcome by my enemies; therefore "Give us help from trouble, for vain is the salvation of men." He, of course, made use of his army; but all his confidence he placed in the almighty protection of God. As we owe adoration to no one but God alone, so also we should not place our confidence in any one but God, the Lord of all things.

Hear this, ye afflicted souls, who complain that you are abandoned by all men, and that you can see no means of deliverance from your misery; ah, all the more favorable is the opportunity you have to place all your hope in God. Believe that you do not say too much when you exclaim: I have no one but God to look to. But in having him you have all; and even if it seems to you that you are abandoned by him, you must still continue to hope that he will not leave you, or that he has left you only for a time, provided you keep your confidence in him and remain in his grace; for that is an infallible sign that he has not forgotten you, since he never forgets those who put their trust in him. Only fear God, love him with your whole hearts, and cast yourselves and all your miseries into his fatherly hands. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD IN SEEMINGLY DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES.

"Be not solicitous about anything; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God." *Phil.* 4 : 6.

Rejoice in the Lord, just Christians, who serve your God : "Rejoice in the Lord always : again I say, rejoice." Such is the exhortation that St. Paul gives you in to-day's epistle. And why should you, children of God, be sorrowful ? What can be wanting to you, who have an infinitely good and faithful Lord as your Father ? "Be not solicitous about anything ; but in all your troubles and necessities fly to him with confidence. Hope and trust in the Lord, and in the Lord *alone*, for he alone *can* and *will* help you. Ah, think some ; there is no more hope or confidence for me ; my circumstances are desperate ! Desperate ? Then so much the better ; for on that very account you can and must place your confidence all the more firmly in God and await his help. *For just when we are in such evil plight that there seems to be, humanly speaking, no hope for us, then should our hope and confidence in God be all the firmer.*

But how can one hope when affairs are in a desperate condition ? And how can one hope all the more that things will turn out well ? Is that credible, or possible ? Hope is the expectation of some future good that is difficult to attain. But when the desired good seems unattainable, is it not more the object of despair than of reasonable hope ? The farmer willingly works in the field and spares no labor or trouble as long as there is a prospect of a harvest. The sick man does violence to himself, and against his will takes the most bitter medicines and pills, as long as there is any reasonable hope of recovering his health. But if

these people see that their trouble and labor will not help them to the desired end ; oh, then their reasonable hope falls to the ground. The husbandman gives up his labor, the sick man refuses to take the prescribed medicines ; for they have good reason to despair of success. This is true, my dear brethren, when we speak of natural hope, which is founded merely on human and natural means.

But we speak of supernatural hope and confidence in God. This should never fail, nor be wanting in the least degree, but rather increase, the more difficulties and impediments stand in the way. Nay, when we see that the natural means we have hitherto used are of no avail, and know that they will be of no avail in the future; when we have exhausted all our ingenuity to no purpose; then must that hope be all the greater, and more fervent, that in spite of former failures we shall yet attain the desired end. And why ? Because supernatural hope is not founded on natural means, nor on our own industry and labor; but it rests on the almighty God, to whom nothing is impossible, whose infinite power is not limited by any difficulty or hindrance, who by an act of his will can restore what is already despaired of. Therefore I can never have reasonable grounds to waver in a hope of this kind, no matter how slight may seem the chances of success.

Read the holy Scriptures, and you will find that God often acted in that manner towards his servants. Thus, for instance, you will find the history of the chaste Susanna. Pure and stainless as was the life of that holy matron, yet she had to suffer from the tongue of calumny, and that, too, on the part of the judges of the people, who accused her publicly of the heinous crime of adultery and, having suborned false witnesses, caused her to be sentenced to be stoned to death. Alas, a hard and bitter fate for one so rich, noble, and innocent, who had hitherto been held in the highest esteem throughout Judea on account of her piety and holiness! And now she had to stand her trial publicly before the people, in presence of her husband, her parents, and relations, as a shameless adulteress. What was she to do ? Her friends were

filled with pity for her, but could not help her. So strong was the testimony of the elders against her, that she had no one to say a word in her favor: "And she, weeping, looked up to heaven; for *her heart had confidence in the Lord*" (Dan. 13 : 33). Meanwhile there was no prospect of help far or near; the people believed the elders: the punishment prescribed for adultery in the divine law was that the guilty one should be publicly stoned to death; the sentence was pronounced, and all cried out unanimously that it was a just one. She was led away to be put to death; when they had already taken up the stones to cast at her, then Susanna, with a dying voice as it were, cried out to God: "Behold, I must die, whereas I have done none of these things which these men have maliciously forged against me" (Dan. 13 : 43).

And now, when there seemed to be not the slightest gleam of hope for her, "The Lord raised up the holy spirit of a young boy, whose name was Daniel; and he cried out with a loud voice: I am clear from the blood of this woman" (Dan. 13 : 45, 46). He protected the innocent, and convicted the elders of falsehood. They were stoned, and Susanna set free, while from that time forward she was held in still greater honor and love by the people and by all posterity. See there, my dear brethren, how wonderfully God knows how to help when things seem desperate. God might have sent Daniel earlier to detect the fraud of the elders, before Susanna was brought before the tribunal; the almighty God could easily have done that; but then the wonderful manner in which he rendered assistance would not have been so evident, nor would such praise have been given him. Another example: Daniel in the lions' den (Dan. 6 : 3, 4, 16, 17, 22, 27).

Poor desolate orphans; you have no father or mother to care for you; you have no friend to take your part; no one to put in a good word for you; not a soul in the world to take the least interest in you; humanly speaking, there is nothing for you but wretchedness and misery. Still, do not lose courage on that account; the almighty God is your father; only present your petitions to

him ; cast yourselves into his lap with full and perfect confidence ; he will care for you ; he will feed and provide for you. Say to him : "To thee is the poor man left ; thou wilt be a helper to the orphan." *Sorrowing widow*, your husband is taken from you by a premature death, and has left you with a houseful of little children ; the business or occupation by which you managed to provide for yourself is in the grave with him. What can you do now ? Humanly speaking, there is no hope for you. *Poor citizen*, you sit at home with your wife and children, sighing in the words of Christ when the hungry crowd was following him in the desert : "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat ?" You work as hard as you can the whole day to try to earn enough to keep body and soul together, but it is only with great difficulty you succeed. What are you to do ? Humanly speaking, your only hope is the beggar's staff. But for that very reason none of you should lose heart ; only love your God and hope in him ; he is the almighty Lord, who can make everything right in a moment ; those trials he sends you are simply intended to prove your hope and to see if it is firm and well grounded. The Lord knows the best time for coming to your assistance and consolation; he says to you what Christ said to his Mother at the marriage-feast of Cana, when the wine failed, and she through compassion begged of him to help : "My hour is not yet come." It is not yet time for me to help you ; but it will come, if you only continue to trust in me.

If we only had that firm faith and trust in God, we should be almighty, as St. Bernard does not hesitate to say : "God makes those who hope in him almighty." Strengthened by a similar confidence, *the young David*, when the army of Israel was filled with dread, and the soldiers were hiding like mice in the holes in the earth, with nothing but his sling in his hand, attacked and overcame the huge and well-armed Goliath, and put the emeny to flight. "Thou comest to me," he said undismayed to the giant, "with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield ; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies

of Israel; and the Lord will deliver thee into my hand, and I will slay thee, and take away thy head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air, and to the beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" who is able to protect us; "and all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear" (1. Kings 17 : 45—47). *Ezechias*, king of Juda, had no army to oppose the great force that Sennacherib had sent against him; nor was there any help to be expected from any other king or country. Confidence in God was his only resource; he went to the Temple and with his people prostrated himself before the divine Majesty, and prayed: "And now, O Lord our God, save us out of his hand, and let all the kingdoms of the earth know that thou only art the Lord." What was the effect of this prayer? God sent Ezechias, not any human aid, but an angel, who in one night slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand men, the whole army of the Assyrians, so that Sennacherib alone with difficulty escaped. *Abias*, king of Juda, and *Jeroboam*, king of Israel, were arrayed against each other; the latter had eight hundred thousand of the bravest and most experienced warriors. The former, too, had good soldiers, but they were only half as numerous. Yet Abias conquered, in spite of the great disparity of the forces, and slew five hundred thousand men of Israel, and put the remainder to flight. What had enabled that weak army to gain such a signal victory? "God is the leader of our army" (11. Paral. 13 :3), said Abias with full confidence in God before setting out to fight. *Zara*, the Ethiopian king, went against *Asa*, king of Juda, with ten hundred thousand men. Asa had only five hundred and eighty thousand to oppose to him, and yet he gained a complete victory. How did Asa manage that? His army was indeed strong, but he did not trust in it; "he called upon the Lord God and said: Lord there is no difference with thee, whether thou help with few or with many; help us, O Lord our God; for with confidence in thee and thy name we are come against this multitude" (11. Paral. 14 : 11). Armed with this confidence, he

attacked the enemy and conquered. "For the Lord slew them, and his army fought against them." Strengthened with a similar confidence, *Judith*, a weak woman, slew Holofernes and put his army to flight, when all the citizens of Bethulia were down-cast and despairing.

Let us therefore constantly rely on God, resign ourselves to his providence even in the greatest extremities, and say to him with child-like confidence, as David did when he was persecuted: "Let not the humble be turned away with confusion; the poor and needy shall praise thy name." Lord, thou knowest how things are with me; I cannot help myself in this extremity by any human aid; all natural means are of no avail. Behold me prostrate at thy feet; do with me as thou wilt; but remember that I place my whole confidence in thee and do not forget what thou hast promised to those who trust in thee alone. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

CONTINUAL CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

"*The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways plain.*"
Luke 3 : 5.

I have hitherto spoken of Christian hope; that in all our necessities we must first have recourse to God, confidently believing that we shall find help with him, because he alone has *the power* and *the will* to help us; that we must not put this confidence in any creature, nor in natural means, although we can and should make use of them, *but in God alone;* because it is from him that natural means, as mere instruments, receive the power of helping us; and when we see that no means that we have used hitherto have been of any avail, and we foresee, moreover, that they will not help us in the future; nay, when, humanly speaking, affairs are in a desperate state, then we must not allow our trust and

confidence in God *alone* to waver, but rather be all the more hopeful of help from him ; because this supernatural confidence is founded on the God of infinite power, goodness, and fidelity, who is able to help us even then, and who for the most part allows our affairs to become desperate, that he may then help us, and that we may ascribe the help received to him alone. There you have in a nutshell the subjects treated of in the last three sermons ; it may be of some good to those who have not heard them. But there is still another point. When we see not only that we cannot do anything with natural means, but that there are obstacles in the way which run directly counter to the end we have in view, must we then still continue to hope for success, if it is for our good ? Certainly

We must not waver in our confidence in God ; because nothing can resist his almighty power.

It seems impossible to us to attain an end by contrary means : to use means that run directly counter to the end proposed, with a view of gaining that end ! How can that be ? Who can understand such things, to our weak understanding seemingly absurd, incomprehensible, nay, impossible? God can easily do that and he cautions us not to judge rashly of what we cannot understand : " My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Is. 4: 8, 9). God is *infinite wisdom ;* he is able to bring about the desired result by means that tend in quite a contrary direction. He is *almighty,* to whom nothing is impossible ; hence we must believe that he can cause temporal prosperity by misfortune ; that he can exalt by humbling, protect by persecution, enrich by poverty, give true peace to the soul by first depriving it of consolation, and turning the instruments that were prepared for our destruction into the means of bringing us happiness and prosperity.

How many have not been helped by God, preserved in life, and raised to most honorable positions by the very means that seemed best adapted to bring about their utter destruction !

Moses was to be as a god for king Pharao in Egypt ; what were the means used to effect that ? The very means that were employed to destroy him and all the Hebrew people. Pharao decreed that all Hebrew children should be drowned as soon as they were born. Such was the fate in store for Moses ; he was put into a basket and laid by the bank of the river. Was that a way to raise him to the dignity for which he was intended ? Truly, it was the means that the all-wise providence of God selected, by whose decree the daughter of Pharao happened just then to come down to the river. She saw the beautiful child on the bank, and through a natural feeling of pity had it taken up and given over to a Hebrew woman, who was Moses' own mother, to be nursed. The mother took the child with joy, "and when he was grown up she delivered him to Pharao's daughter. And she adopted him for a son" (Exod. 2: 9). Thus Moses was brought up in the court, until by God's command he became a ruler over Pharao, and the saviour of his own people. Before Moses' time, God had resolved to make Joseph viceroy of Egypt ; what means did he use to that end ? Those which seemed best adapted to ruin Joseph. His brothers could not bear him, because he had prophesied that they should one day prostrate themselves before him ; and animated by hatred and envy, they determined to put him out of the way. They "cast him into an old pit," and finally sold him as a slave to the Ishmaelites. Now, said they with sardonic laughter, "it shall appear what his dreams avail him." This very act on the part of his brothers helped Joseph to come to Egypt, where after many wonderful adventures he was at last placed on the throne, and his brothers, driven by hunger, were obliged to come and bend the knee before him.

The three holy kings were led from the East by a star to find and adore the new-born Saviour of the world ; when they came near to Jerusalem, they lost sight of the star, so that they knew not where to go. Why did God deprive them of the guiding star at that time ? Who was to show them the place in which they would find Christ ? Herod was to do that. He who would not

tolerate any other king in Juda except himself, whose only object was to slay Christ and all those who adored him, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" (Matt. 2: 2.) was filled with rage and confusion? And king Herod, was he the man to point out the place where Christ was born? Yes, it was Herod who against his will helped the kings to find the place and to adore their Lord. "And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Juda" (Matt. 4: 5). Whereupon Herod called the Wise Men, "and sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go, and diligently inquire after the child" (Matt. 4: 5). Thus does God bring the ship into the desired haven even with a contrary wind; for where God's providence works, all obstacles lose their efficacy. How did the Christians after the preaching of the Gospel increase so rapidly in every part of the world? By the very means that were used to prevent that increase; namely, by persecution, by the slaughtering and murdering of Christians in almost every country of the world. The more they were persecuted, the more numerous did they become. The blood of the martyrs was the seed from which Christians sprang.

But why? God does that to show his unlimited power, which nothing can successfully oppose, nor frustrate; to purge our confidence in him of all natural and human hope, so that we may ascribe our success in all cases to him alone, when we consider that natural means have been rather a hindrance than otherwise, and, to strengthen all the more our confidence in him alone, so that even in the most desperate circumstances we may never lose the hope of success, provided it is good for our souls. That want of courage is very common amongst us when we fail in our attempts, or when the contrary to what we have desired happens. For instance, the children fly to God for help during the dangerous sickness of the father or mother, that they may not be deprived of their chief means of support; meanwhile the father or mother grows worse, and dies. There is no hope for us any more, think the children. Good parents have a wicked, disobedient son, with

whom they have fruitlessly tried exhortations, threats, and punishment to bring him to his senses; they appeal to God, and confidently leave their son to him. Meanwhile the latter becomes more wicked and dissolute day by day. Ah, think the parents, all our trouble is in vain!

No, that is not the way to have confidence in God. Our confidence in God should never waver. Put your unshaken trust in that almighty Lord, who uses the most contrary means to attain the wished-for end, and is wont thus to act that our hope in him may be all the firmer. He can and will provide for the children, if they but trust in him, even by the death of their father or mother, and provide for them better than if their parents were alive and in good health. He can and will convert that wicked son, even after he has grown worse, and when the parents least expect it.

Who had more reason to give up all hope and confidence, nay, to despair of having any posterity, than Abraham? God had promised to increase his descendants by his son Isaac beyond all peoples. "And God said to Abraham: Sara, thy wife, shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name Isaac, and I will establish my covenant with him, and with his seed after him . . . and he shall become nations, and kings of peoples shall spring from him" (Gen. 17 : 19, 16). And yet soon after Abraham was commanded by God to slay his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham might easily have thought; Isaac is to continue my family, and now I must sacrifice him? That is the very way to destroy my hopes of posterity and to put an end to my family. Yet Abraham set out with his dear son. When they came to the place pointed out by God, he laid his son on the altar; "and he put forth his hand, and took the sword to sacrifice his son" (Gen. 22 : 10). Did Abraham then despair of having posterity by Isaac? No, he still remained firm in his hope. What God promised, he thought, must be fulfilled. God has assured me that Isaac shall continue my family; therefore it will be so, even after I have slain him, although I cannot imagine how it will be brought about. "In the

promise also of God, says St. Paul of him, he staggered not by distrust, but was strengthened by faith, giving glory to God : most fully knowing that whatsoever he hath promised, he is able also to perform. Who against hope believed in hope" (Rom. 4 : 20, 21, 18). Why against hope? Because, humanly speaking, he could not hope under the circumstances to have descendants by Isaac ; and yet he hoped, relying on the divine promises. That is the meaning of the words of the patient Job : "Although he should kill me, I will trust in him." That is, although God acts towards me in such a way as to seem to leave me without any hope, yet will I hope and trust that things shall go well with me. What shall be the consequence? "And thou shalt be fed with its riches" (Ps. 34 : 3). "Delight in the Lord ;" that is, treat so confidently with him, that you actually enjoy yourself with him. And what then? "And he will give thee the requests of thy heart" (Ps. 34 : 4).

But there is one thing you must not forget : You must distinguish between the petition of your heart and the petition of your sensuality. Many hope for money from God ; many hope for fleeting and perishable honors. Such people despair and think their hopes in God put to shame if misfortune brings them from a high to a lowly position, in which they cannot live as before in abundance; and now the object of their desires is to be restored to their former affluence. They hope for and desire wealth and honorable position, that they may enjoy the esteem of the world and live in idleness, comfort, and extravagance, indulge in gluttony, conform to the vanity of the world, and gratify their sensuality. Such desires come not from the reasoning heart, but from the unreasoning flesh. No; God has promised to give what is necessary to the support of the body, but not superfluities that are injurious to the soul.

Place your hope, then, in God, and ask him for what is necessary, and for other things too, whatever they may be, but with this condition, if they be conducive for your salvation; and be constant in this hope, not wavering, but certain and assured that your wish

will be granted. Say to yourselves, like Abraham: What God has promised must infallibly be done; he has promised to give me all that is good and useful for me if I trust in him alone; so that I may be certain of it, even if all the men, all angels, and all demons stood in the way. Therefore I will continue to hope, and with that hope in all present and future necessities of soul and body I will first fly to God; with that hope I will be consoled in all trials and crosses, being assured, that, since all things are God's, he who has God is in want of nothing.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER.

"*Who departed not from the temple, by fasting and prayers serving night and day.*" *Luke* 2 : 37.

Simeon, an old priest; Anna, a widow eighty-four years of age, come into the temple at the same time. They were both ignorant of what was to happen to them there, and both had the great joy and glory in their old age, before the end of their lives, to see and know Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Both were anxiously looking out for the redemption of Israel, that is, the advent of the promised Messias. Both were equally confident in the prayers they offered up in the temple for this end. Therefore both had the happiness and great joy to see their Saviour. He who trusts in God shall not be disappointed. Now, if besides constancy we also have confidence in prayer, what may we not obtain from God? Everything that it is possible for us to obtain. For

I. Confident prayer is the only one to which God can refuse nothing;

II. Yet, God is very good in sometimes not hearing our prayers.

I. God wishes us to pray to him as children to a father. And he

calls himself by this name "Father" almost exclusively when speaking of prayer. *Our Father who art in heaven.* Do you wish to pray? says Christ in the Gospel of St. Matthew. Then go into your room alone, and there call on your Father: "But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee." "Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you."

With what confidence should we not go to our heavenly Father and pray to him, who is so loving, so fatherly. He says of himself by the prophet Isaias: "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee; behold, I have graven thee in my hands" (Is. 49: 15, 16). And Christ assures us: "I say not to you that I will ask the Father for you;" that is not necessary, "for the Father himself loveth you" (John 16: 26, 27); and he is already inclined and most desirous to bestow on you all the graces you wish. And yet we hesitate to trust to such a God! And we are afraid to approach him with a joyful countenance, lest he should be displeased. Nay, we tremble when we think of him, and dare not allow ourselves to believe that he means well towards us. We are filled with anguish when we remember the eternity to which we are hastening, and have not courage enough to claim a share in God and in the happiness he has promised in the next life. In a word, we almost despair of ever getting to heaven. O ye of little faith, I must say to such people: Let those who do not serve their God give way to despair and want of confidence; but you who try to serve God and do his will, hope in the Lord.

II. Every promise makes an obligation. What we promise we are bound to fulfil. Hence he who is infinitely faithful, and cannot deceive, must of necessity keep his promise. And truly he will do so; but mark well that he has not bound himself to hear the prayer that is, as it were, carelessly thrown down before him. "If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to

all men abundantly, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." But how is he to ask? "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind; therefore let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord" (James 1 : 5—7). Hence we must pray in faith and without hesitation. In faith, that is, with the confidence of being heard; nothing wavering, that is, not doubting of being heard. Such, too, is the meaning our Lord gives to the word *faith* when he uses it speaking of prayer: "I say unto you, all things, whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you" (Mark 11 : 24). "If thou canst believe," said he to the father who asked him to free his son from the dumb spirit, "all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9 : 22). "Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee" (Matt. 8 : 13), said he to the centurion.

We are surprised and sometimes even complain that, although we ask so often and for so many things, we are not heard, in spite of having in our favor that promise of the almighty God, "Ask, and you shall receive." How does that happen? Ah, when I consider the matter, I find that it is our fault; we know not what we ask; for if we ask for heaven and eternal goods, we wish to obtain them without working for them; we cry out daily, "Thy kingdom come," and by our sinful lives we shut the gate of that kingdom against ourselves. Hence we know not, or better, we do not wish for what we ask. And when we pray for temporal goods, to which our desires generally tend, then we seldom know what we ask for. *Therefore God is very good to us when he refuses to hear our prayers, and it would often be a great misfortune for us if he granted them, to the end that we may learn and know how to pray in a more intelligent, salutary, and useful manner.*

How can he who knows not what is good and what evil understand what he prays for when he desires to have the former and to be freed from the latter? Perhaps what he looks on as evil is good, and what he considers good is evil. Hence, if he ventures

to entertain such desires, and they are fulfilled, he will find himself disappointed, and must acknowledge, when too late, that he was wrong. He acts just as imprudently as a man born blind who tries to distinguish between colors. For how can he know what is black or white? He is like a traveler quite unacquainted with the country, who on coming to a cross-road determines which to take solely by the appearance of the roads.

How many desired to be freed from some imaginary evil, which after all turned out to their best advantage? How troubled Joseph was while in prison in Egypt! How earnestly he implored the butler to put in a good word for him, that he might be released! But be satisfied, Joseph! You know not what you ask and desire; it is not good for you to be released now; the prison is still the best place for you. If the butler had remembered his promise to Joseph, and entreated Pharao to release him, truly, Joseph's desire for freedom would have been gratified; but then he would have been compelled either to serve some other Egyptian master, or else to return to his own country; and in that case, who would have interpreted the dream that Pharao subsequently had? The two years' imprisonment that Joseph still had to suffer was the cause of his being raised to the dignity of viceroy of Egypt, and placed in a position to save so many people from perishing of hunger. Again, in the case of the prodigal, how he longed for the husks that were given to the swine, that he might satiate his hunger with them, and his longing was fruitless! But this very extremity of misery that he suffered was the cause of his at last opening his eyes.

And is it not the same in the world nowadays? I take you yourselves to witness, my dear brethren. Let each of you consider his own experience, and recall to mind those things that he desired most eagerly, prayed for most fervently, and received with the utmost joy and satisfaction, and he will have to acknowledge that those very things were to him frequently a source of uneasiness, chagrin, and difficulty, and that he would have been far better off if he had never received them. That imaginary

piece of good luck, that lucrative property, that honorable position, that employment, that profitable business, that you made the object of your earnest desire until you obtained it, like the prodigal in the Gospel,—must you not confess that sometimes it brought you in nothing but envy, jealousy, hatred, persecution, disunion, enmity, trouble and labor, disquiet and anxiety? To what must many a one ascribe his intolerable domestic trials, his secret anguish, poverty and want, his daily moanings and lamentations, if not to that marriage which, like Samson, he desired as the one thing to complete his happiness, strove for many years, and, at last, secured, with the result that his life is now poisoned by constant hatred and disunion, reviling and cursing, until it is made a hell on earth for him? How many parents have not, like Rachel, wearied heaven with their prayers and devotions to obtain children, or to preserve them in health? and yet those very children, because they were undutiful, or stupid, or weakly and delicate, were to their parents the source of nothing but disappointment, trouble, and shame. And such you will find to have been the case in many instances which you know better than I can tell you.

Now, if we are so ignorant in things that concern our bodily and temporal welfare, how much less can we know whether the object of our prayers and wishes is good or not for our eternal welfare? Here we must indeed all acknowledge that we are stone-blind. How many would be now in hell for all eternity if they had obtained the health, riches, or honor before men that they longed for, who have actually gained heaven by means of sickness and weakness, poverty and want, contempt and lowliness! How many would now be in heaven, rejoicing with the Angels and Saints of God, if their prayers had not been heard, and if they had not obtained what they so eagerly desired; who, when their prayers for temporal prosperity were granted, began to lead perverse lives, continued therein, and after an unhappy death were hurled into the abyss of hell!

It is often a special gift of God to refuse to hear our prayers,

and to withhold from us what we desire. "He sometimes refuses us in his goodness." Through love for us, he denies us what he foresees we should make a bad use of. In what better manner could he show his love for us as our father, or his skill as our physician? What does the loving father do when his child cries for a knife? He puts it away at once, and showing the child his empty hand, says: See, there is no knife there. But the child cries out again, there is one on the table. No, says the father; you are mistaken; and he makes a sign to have the knife taken away and hidden. The child still continues to cry; but the father takes no notice, and is determined not to give it the knife. Is that harshness? No, it is fatherly love. The knife is not good for the child. How the poor man ill with fever tumbles and tosses about! He cannot bear anything on him; he tries to get out of bed, and cries out for cold water. Oh, he exclaims, will you let me die of thirst? Am I to be smothered with heat in this bed? What does the doctor do? He pretends to take no notice, and tells the nurse to cover the sick man better still, lest he should die before his time. The sick man does not understand the reason of this, but the doctor does.

God deprives you of consolation by the death of your husband, wife, child, or dear friend; he takes away some pleasure from you by misfortune or loss, whether you like it or not; he gives you that bitter chalice of suffering or calamity to drink, whether it pleases you or not; and meanwhile he allows you to cry, and moan, and sigh to him for help, and to act like the sick man, but he, like the wise physician, takes not the least notice, since he knows best what is conducive to your welfare. You, indeed, seek what is good for you, but such, too, is the object of his desires. In what does your greatest good consist? You cannot say, because you are a child, a sick man; but God knows all about it, and arranges everything to that end, because he is your father and physician. Place yourself, then, and all that belongs to you, in his hands; allow him to do with you what he pleases, and be assured that everything will turn out for the salvation of your soul.

Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE PEACE OF HEART THAT COMES FROM A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

"*Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.*". *Luke* 2: 48.

Mary and Joseph, whose souls were enlightened and united to the will of God, were they oppressed with sadness and anguish of mind? Yes, they were; and they had good reason for it; they had lost Jesus, the divine Child; and this loss was the only thing on earth that could disturb the peace of their hearts. We are daily disturbed and uneasy at heart. Why? Is it because we have lost Jesus? Ah, if that were the reason of the sighs and tears of sinners, they would soon find peace again! But that is not generally the cause of our trouble. What is it, then? We have now so many trials and calamities to contend with; sickness threatens our health and life; manifold troubles make life bitter to us. If I could now say to you with truth: be comforted! rejoice! you have nothing to fear; would that not be good news for you? Well, I am not wanting in good wishes in your regard; and if you do your part, you will attain peace of heart that comes from a good conscience.

I. A constant peace of heart is a beautiful and consoling good;
II. How we must seek this peace to remain with us in all circumstances

I. In what does peace of heart consist? It consists in this: that no matter what troubles, crosses, or trials come to us from exterior sources, we still keep the heart quiet and tranquil. This is what the Angels announced at the birth of our Lord: "And on earth peace to men of good will" (Luke 2: 14). This is the peace that Christ left to his disciples when he sent them forth as lambs in the midst of ravening wolves: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I

give unto you" (John 14 : 27). It is the peace that St. Paul wishes the Philippians : "And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4: 7).

Oh ! what a beautiful good, to have peace with one's self, to be always and unchangeably contented and satisfied at heart ! This is the best, nay, the only true good that man can enjoy on this earth. "There is no pleasure above the joy of the heart"(Ecclus. 30: 16). And in truth, how would it help me to happiness to have all the goods of the world, if I were discontented at heart ? And how could it make me unhappy to be the poorest of men, if I am peaceful and contented at heart ? Therefore whenever the Holy Scriptures speak of peace, they always assign the heart as its true dwelling-place. Thus Anna in her Canticle says: "My heart hath rejoiced" (1. Kings 2:2). And Ecclesiasticus: "My heart delighted" (Ecclus. 41: 20). And David : "Thou hast given gladness in my heart " (Ps. 4: 7). The joy itself of the elect consists in inward joy and peace of heart. All men seek and desire this peace ; as there is no one who does not wish to rejoice so there is no one who does not wish to have peace. That is, there is no one who does not wish to be contented, pleased, and satisfied at heart. Ask the farmer in the field, the tradesman in his workshop, the merchant in his journeys by sea and land, what they seek by their labor ; and they will all answer, contentment and peace of heart—that is the object of all their thoughts, desires, and cares. If I were not so poor, say some, if I were as rich as those others, I should be contented. If I were in as high a position, think others, as such-and-such a one, I should be contented. If there were nothing to prevent me from enjoying the love of that creature I should be contented. Ah, you are wrong from the very start ! "O ye sons of men," I may well exclaim with David, "how long will you be dull of heart ? Why do you love vanity and seek after lying ?" (Ps. 4: 3.) Peace is not to be found where you are looking for it. The goods that you seek are external to yourselves ; they cannot touch the heart or satisfy it interiorly. Get posses-

sion of all the riches and honors and pleasures of earth; what good will they do you, if you have to lie sick in bed? Will they give you peace? No. And why not? Because health, which is an interior good, is wanting to you; without it all outward things cannot bring you contentment. "When you say," writes St. Augustine, "I wish to live happily, you desire a good thing, but you cannot have it here." So it is; to no purpose do you seek in the world what you cannot find in it, nor expect from it.

There never was since the beginning of the world and there never will be till the end of it any one who found perfect satisfaction and contentment in honors, riches or pleasures. No matter how abundantly one may be provided with them, there still remains a want, which disturbs the peace of the heart. Achab was a great king in Israel; was he contented in the midst of his riches and treasures? Hear what the Scripture says of him: "Angry and fretting, ... and casting himself upon his bed, he turned away his face to the wall and would eat no bread" (3. Kings 31 : 4). What was the matter with him? What distressed him to such an extent? Naboth had a vineyard near the palace, and Achab wished to get possession of it in order to increase his gardens, but failed to do so. That was the sole cause of his discontent. And was it worth while to trouble himself so much about it? Was a piece of ground that he wanted able to disturb his heart and cause him such worry that he was inconsolable? Peace and quiet of heart do not consist in having an abundance of worldly goods and riches, but in being content even with a little. Aman, the favorite of king Assuerus, came home to his wife and dilated on the extent of his glory and honor: Was he happy with all his honors? Not by any means! "And whereas I have all these things," he said with bitterness of heart, "I think I have nothing" (Esther 5 : 13). What was wanting to him? Mardochai alone refused to honor him, and that caused him so much pain that all his riches could give him no pleasure.

Ptolemy, king of Egypt, was once walking on the bank of the Nile, when he saw some laborers, who after having eaten their

poor meal, which consisted of bread and water, began to laugh and joke with each other. The king could not restrain his sighs and tears at seeing how happy those poor and lowly people were, "Ah unhappy me!" he exclaimed, "that I cannot be one of them." Charles V., that great Roman emperor, makes the same confession with regard to himself. After having heroically despised the world so far as to abdicate his crown and retire into solitude, he acknowledged that the whole time while he was king and emperor he never enjoyed a single quarter of an hour of true peace and contentment of heart, such as he did enjoy after having left the world. To put the matter briefly; was there ever a man in the world who had more of its riches, honors, and pleasures than Solomon? Gold and silver were to him like the stones on the street. On account of his wonderful wisdom, kings and queens of other countries looked on him almost as a god. He himself describes the pleasures he enjoyed: "Whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not: and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure, and delighting itself in the things which I had prepared." But was he contented and happy with it all? Hear what he says of it: "I saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind" (Ecclus. 2 : 10).

II. All the exterior goods of the world, its honors, riches, and joys are not capable of contenting or filling the human heart. It is useless, then, to seek for peace of heart in such things. Therefore you must seek it in something better than all that the world can give or take away; in something better than yourself. And what can that be unless God? There is only one Good, and that is an infinite one which can satisfy your heart. So great is the dignity of the human heart, that no good except the Supreme Good can satisfy it. This Good we can all possess, if we wish, by keeping our consciences in the state of grace and free from sin. If I have a good conscience, then God is mine, and with him I have all that I can wish or desire. And God is so permanently and constantly mine that no angel in heaven, no devil in hell, no man on earth, no joy or sorrow, can deprive me of him, unless with my

own consent ; and he is mine with the assurance that, if I only keep my conscience pure, I shall possess him for all eternity.

This joy of heart, this peace of a good conscience is what I wish you, not only for this year, but for all the years of your lives.

Peace be with you, *married people !* The most necessary thing in your state is peace and harmony with each other. If that is wanting, oh, then your state is a bitter one, a hell as bad as it can be made on this earth ! Ah, perhaps some are now thinking, that is what we have to complain of ! That drunken, passionate husband has not a kind word or look for me ; he can only curse and abuse. That vain, idle wife loses her time paying useless visits, and allows the house to take care of itself ; she spends more in dress than I can make in a year ; the children are obstinate and disobedient ; how can we have peace and contentment under such circumstances ? But where do all these disorders come from ? You are not at peace with God in your hearts ; you have not a good conscience which is in all things conformable to the will of God. If you only endeavor to keep in the friendship of God, the evils you complain of will soon be remedied ; the husband will love his wife, the wife will obey her husband ; parents will bring up their children carefully for heaven; children will love their parents, and show them due honor ; and therefore all will enjoy peace and contentment, on which so much depends.

Peace be with you, *unmarried people !* Many of you, who are still in the bloom of youth, seek peace, pleasure, and happiness in living according to the world, in dressing and adorning yourselves to please the eyes of others, in talking, amusing yourselves, going on parties of pleasure, dancing, and such things. But what a great mistake you are making ! "Seek what you are seeking," says St. Augustine, "but there is no peace where you are looking for it." True peace of heart is to be found nowhere but in a pure conscience united with God ; in the follies you seek the conscience is often wounded. Your hearts are created for far better things ! It is God, and God alone whom you should love,

him should you possess by sanctifying grace, and in him should you rejoice. Only try to please him; clear out your hearts for him, and avoid with the utmost care all that could offend him; then you will be able to rejoice even in solitude, and to say with truth: "I found him whom my soul loveth" (Cant. 3 : 4). I possess God, and with him true peace and joy of heart.

Peace be with you, *sinners!* For you this wish is most necessary, because, as you are in the state of sin, you have lost peace altogether. No doubt, unless you are hardened in wickedness, you will acknowledge that it is an evil and a bitter thing for you to have left the Lord your God" (Jer. 2 : 19). "For who hath resisted him, and hath had peace?" (Job. 9 : 4.) "There is no peace for the wicked." Who could be contented and happy, knowing that God, who is present everywhere, is his enemy? No one. Come, then; delay no longer; return by true penance, and enjoy that peace which the merciful, though angry God offers you every moment; then you will see and experience that there is a great difference between being a servant of God and a slave of the devil, and how sweet it is to enjoy peace of mind in a good conscience. Again do I wish you all, "the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding." May it "keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4 : 7). May it remain with you all the years of your lives, until you enjoy it with the elect of God in the kingdom of heaven for all eternity. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE HAPPINESS OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

"*And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples, to the marriage.*"
John 2: 2.

Truly, a happy marriage-feast at which Jesus is present. Doubtless those people of Cana had learned by faith that Christ, their guest, was the true God and Saviour of the world. Now I

leave you to imagine what exuberant joy and gladness they must have felt in their hearts at the marriage-feast; and meanwhile I shall continue the subject I have commenced, and wish you peace, that peace which cannot be found unless in the possession of God by a good conscience. And that peace cannot be disturbed save and except by sin alone, which drives God out of the conscience; therefore, to keep it constantly, all we need do is to avoid sin.

The peace of heart in a good conscience is a continual, joyful marriage-feast for the human soul; therefore let him who wishes to taste this joy preserve peace of heart with his God in a good conscience.

Many delicate viands skilfully prepared, choice wines, agreeable company, pleasant conversation, laughing and jollity, music and dancing: there you have the joys and pleasures of a marriage-feast. But many a guest, although he seems to enjoy himself, is at heart ill at ease. He whose stomach rejects the costly dishes and wines cannot have much pleasure in eating or drinking. If there be among the guests one who is unpopular, or one who is regarded with dislike, or, as is often the case, who is a disagreeable, quarrelsome fellow, the harmony of the feast is disturbed, and each one wishes he had remained at home. He who thinks of his secret domestic cross can have no joy in the conversation, music, or dancing; for while his lips laugh, his heart is weeping. And when the feast is over the pleasure goes with it, and all one can say of it is, I have enjoyed myself. Even the bride and the bridegroom sometimes find their happiness gone after a few weeks, or even a few days; their laughter is turned into weeping, and one or other of them begins to sigh: ah, would that I were as I was before! Many of the guests bring home with them an uneasy conscience, a melancholy, gloomy spirit, on account of the great freedom allowed. So it is in the world; the joy it offers its friends is seldom an unadulterated one, never a perfect, true, and constant one.

Far different, more pleasant, and joyful is the marriage-feast promised by the Holy Ghost to those who keep the peace of heart in a good conscience. "A secure mind is like a continual feast"

(Prov. 15 : 15), which is never interrupted or disturbed in its joy. But you say, how is that? For even a poor man can have a good conscience. Truly he can, and, as a general rule, he can keep it easier in poverty and want than in riches and abundance. But what sort of a marriage-feast is that in which even a bit of bread is sometimes wanting? Where are the different dishes? the costly wines? the pleasant company? the agreeable music? the laughing and dancing, that go to make up a merry feast? Ah, answers St. Paul, you are wrong in your ideas of the matter: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink" (Rom. 14 : 17). You must know that the kingdom of God consists in a pious soul and a good conscience, not in earthly follies and amusements.

Now you can easily understand what makes up that pleasant company in the feast that a good conscience prepares for the soul. What more pleasant company, or delightful society can one have than that which God cultivates with the soul, and the soul with God? Truly, God is present in all places and with all creatures; but he is present in a special manner by sanctifying grace with the soul that has a good conscience; that is, as one friend with another. By sanctifying grace, the whole Trinity dwells in the mind, according to the words: "We will come to him, and will make our abode with him" (John 14 : 23). Shut up a soul that loves God in a gloomy dungeon where it is alone day and night, and never sees a human being; still it will find pastime and consolation enough in the company of God, whenever its conscience suggests the thought: "My beloved to me and I to him" (Cant. 2:16). What better thing can I have or wish for on earth?

In that company we need not fear annoyance, quarrelling, or contradiction; we have not to weigh our words, as is the case in other company and in worldly gatherings; the more freely and intimately the soul deals with God, the more is he pleased, and the more consoling is he in return; and what perfects the joy and pleasure of this intimacy is the assurance of a good conscience, that one loves the other sincerely and is loved sincerely in return. Nothing is sweeter among the children of the world

than love, which alleviates all trouble and sorrow ; and consequently nothing is more agreeable than the society of the loved one, especially when there is a certainty that one's love is reciprocated. Now that certainty can rarely be had with regard to men. For instance, you may be really loved by the person to whom you have given your heart ; but if you are not aware of that fact your joy is not increased thereby ; and if you think the contrary, namely, that you are not loved, your anguish and melancholy increase in proportion to the violence of your passion. But if you believed that you are loved, when such is not really the case, you are happy indeed, but your happiness is founded on a false idea. Nothing of the kind have you to fear with God, if your conscience is pure ; for he who loves God is assured that God loves him, as our faith teaches : "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8 : 17). The very love that the soul has for God is an effect of God's love for the soul : "My beloved to me, and I to him."

The testimony of a good conscience is the sweetest music. You will find that in a good conscience the hearing also is delighted by the sweet voice of the interior consoler, which testifies to the soul that it is in the state of grace, a child of God, the joy of the Angels, a comrade of the elect, an heir of the kingdom of heaven. That is the voice of which St. Paul writes to the Romans. "For the Spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also ; heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8 : 16, 17). It is the voice of Christ saying to his just servants : "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven" (Matt. 5 : 12). Epicurus, that wicked and carnal man, used to give this lesson to his disciples. He who wishes to enjoy thoroughly the pleasures of the world and of the senses, must first be firmly convinced and persuaded that there is neither God nor hell. What did he mean by that ? His meaning was, that a pleasure enjoyed with the fear of hell and of the divine vengeance before one's eyes is no pleasure at all, but rather a torment and a misery. From this I conclude, that if the fear of hell, with which God can punish men, is in it-

self enough to embitter all enjoyment, and to turn pleasure into pain ; then who has not the fear of hell, possesses the greatest peace of heart, and that all the more when he is assured besides of eternal glory. This is what a good conscience says to us : I am now in a state in which I need not fear hell ; I am in a state in which I have a sure pledge of eternal happiness, a pledge that I can keep as long as I will, and that no man can take from me ! I can consider heaven as something that is really prepared for me, and belongs to me by right. Could more joyful notes than these possibly resound in our ears ?

And what can follow such sweet music, but dancing at the marriage-feast ? Not indeed the rapid moving of the feet in the midst of a laughing circle, but the exultation of the heart rejoicing in God, as the Blessed Virgin says of herself : "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour :" that is, according to the literal meaning of the words, "has leaped with joy"(Luke 1 : 47).To this the prophet David encourages all faithful servants of God : "Serve ye the Lord with gladness. Come in before his presence with exceeding great joy" (Ps. 99 : 2), that is, with hearts leaping with joy.

Vain children of the world, bring all your pleasures together, and say, if you can, that no joy is ever wanting to you ! You dare not, could not with truth make that boast. To make that still clearer, go with me in thought, and consider those two great men, one of whom sought happiness in the pleasures of the world, on the broad road leading to hell, and the other in the consolations of a good conscience on the narrow path to heaven : the emperor Tiberius in the island of Capri, and St. Francis Xavier in the island of Goa. Ask Tiberius how he enjoyed himself and you will hear him exclaiming : "May the gods punish me, if I do not die every day". But is that really the case, Tiberius ? Are you really dying of melancholy ? Yes, I cannot conceal my disgust and weariness ; daily does it seem to me as if I must die ! Think of this, my dear brethren ; an emperor, a monarch of the world, with the crown on his head, the sceptre in his hand, seated on the greatest

throne on earth, surrounded by the highest nobles of the land who wait on him, served by numerous vassals, feared and honored by foreign nations; and yet he says of himself, "I die every day! May the gods punish me, if I have not to die every day!" Yet I readily believe him; for even pleasures and delights turn to bitterness when the conscience is in a bad state. "All his good fortune, his riches, honors, and pleasures, could not save Tiberius from the tortures of his own mind, nor keep him from acknowledging his misery".

Now turn your eyes to St. Francis Xavier. See how he pants, and cries out: "Enough, O Lord, enough!" Oh, what consolation, what joy, inundates my heart; cease, O Lord, or else I shall die of abundance; my heart is too small to hold the immense consolation thou dost pour into it! Remember, that Xavier is a stranger among heathens, without money, servants, house, home, or bed; and yet he is compelled to cry out, on account of the exceeding great joy of his heart: "Enough, O Lord!" So great is the difference between the joy of heart in God, which a good conscience brings, and the vain delights of the world and the flesh. It is true, then, that "A secure mind is like a continual feast;" a good conscience, content with God, is a joyful marriage-feast.

Christians, do you, too, wish to taste the happiness of this feast? Do you wish to have here on earth consolation, joy, and peace of heart? Then see that you are free from sin, have good consciences, and keep in the friendship of God. But I am afraid, many will think like Nathaniel, when Philip described to him the wonders wrought by our Lord, and tried to persuade him to follow Christ. "What!" exclaimed Nathaniel; "can anything of good come from Nazareth"? "If you do not believe me," answered Philip, "come and see." Come and see Christ; hear his word; you will surely be so attracted by him that you will not wish to leave him. There are many who think like Nathaniel; when one speaks to them of the indescribable joy of a good conscience, they say: how can that be; it is impossible! Ah, I say to them in the words of Philip, "come and see!" If you do not believe it, then put it to the proof;

purify your consciences and that thoroughly ; begin to serve God faithfully with your whole hearts, and then you will see how sweet it is to serve him. But you must be in earnest about it ; for many flatter themselves that they have good consciences ; but they deceive themselves, for they wish to look on everything as lawful that suits their inclinations, and are not willing to do all that God requires of them. What wonder, then, that they do not experience this consolation and peace of heart ! Come and see ; act honestly with God for once ; begin to love him with your whole hearts. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (Ps. 33 : 9) to them that love him ; then your own experience will force you to acknowledge that the true and only joy of the heart comes from the Creator and not from the creature, and can be had even in the midst of the trials and calamities of life. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE PEACE OF CONSCIENCE IN TRIALS AND UNDER CALUMNY.

"I will come and heal him." Matt. 8: 7.

If Christ were to appear amongst us in visible form and go about helping the poor and infirm in their necessities, what complaints and lamentations he would hear? My husband, my wife, my father, my mother, my child, my brother, sister, is lying at home sick. We know not where to turn, so great is our misery, the poor would say. Others would exclaim : We have much unhappiness, discomfort, and uneasiness at home ; what will become of us ? While others again, with tears in their eyes, would sigh forth : now I am completely desolate; I have no one to help me, I am oppressed on all sides! I am persecuted, slandered and calumniated. Ah, what am I to do ? Be of good heart ! he says to all : "Come to me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." "Take up my yoke upon you" (Matt. 11 : 28, 29). Serve me faithfully and constantly; keep in

my friendship by a good conscience; and then I shall not need to come to you, for I shall be already in your hearts ; and I will refresh you ; I will console and comfort you.

I. The peace of a good conscience in the possession of God is a true joy of heart, even in the midst of the trials and crosses of this life.

II. And under calumny.

I. We must distinguish the joy and peace of the heart from the joy and peace that come from outward things and from our natural inclinations. It is true that temporal crosses and trials are painful and disagreeable to man, for they torment, annoy, and disturb him. The pains of illness hurt; and so does the loss of temporal goods, and poverty and want, and shame and disgrace, and the death of our dear friends. Therefore those things are called trials and crosses ; their nature is to annoy, trouble, and hurt. But what do they annoy ? What do they trouble and cause pain to in man ? The sensitiveness of the body, the outward senses, the natural inclinations that are always trying to shun what is painful and disagreeable to them, they indeed are tormented; but that is not always the case with the heart, the spirit, the reasoning soul. The heart can have peace and joy while the body is writhing in pain, the mouth sighing, the eyes weeping. And if that were not the case, how could so many martyrs have been able to laugh and make merry in the midst of their cruel tortures ? How could St. Paul have said with truth: "I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation" ? (2. Cor. 7: 4.) This inward joy and peace of heart even in the midst of trials and crosses is the work of a good conscience; for there is nothing so powerful in consoling the mind as a pure conscience, although we may be surrounded by hundreds of temptations.

We have a striking example of this in the three youths in the fiery furnace. The spectators thought that the youths were already burnt to ashes ; but on the contrary they walked about amidst the flames, as if they were in a flower-garden, singing the

praises of God, and not a hair of their heads was injured. Again ; Moses had been for a long time on mount Sinai ; the Israelites in the camp saw the mountain covered with smoke, surrounded with flames, and vomiting forth lightnings and thunders. They thought that their leader must be either stifled in the smoke, or struck by the lightning, or burned by the flames. Meanwhile Moses sat in the midst of the flashing lightnings as joyful as if he were in paradise, and was happy in being able to speak with God. Jonas was thrown into the sea, and in the sight of his companions was swallowed by a huge fish. Ah, said they, there cannot be the least hope for him now ! The fish has devoured him ! And yet Jonas was quite strong and healthy in the belly of the whale, and after he had repented of his disobedience was filled with hope and confidence in God by prayer. All these are figures of the soul which has a good conscience, and has to bear all kinds of trials and contradictions. In the eyes of men, who look only at what appears outwardly, they seem on the point of dying of sorrow and anguish : "In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die ;" but inwardly in their hearts they are quite pleased with their God : "They are in peace."

What would have been our thoughts, had we been present and seen the holy martyrs of Christ laughing, exulting, and mocking their persecutors in the midst of their torments, and urging them as it were to still greater cruelties ? If we had seen a St. Lawrence roasting on the gridiron, and heard him saying to the tyrant : "I am now roasted on this side ; turn me over and eat"? If we had seen a St. Eulalia, a maiden thirteen years old, with her whole body torn to pieces and covered with blood, and heard her asking the tyrant to put salt into her wounds to increase her pain, and to make her flesh more palatable for his cruel taste ?

I do not mean that peace of heart, even in those who have a good conscience, cannot be attacked or disturbed by any tyrant. No, such an imperturbable peace belongs only to the elect in heaven. It is not unusual for a just soul to be sometimes suddenly laden with such a heavy cross that at first it is filled with anguish

and disturbed in mind; but that disturbance does not last long ; all it need do is to recollect itself, and offer up a short prayer to God, beg for patience, and say : This cross comes to me from the hand of God. This one thought is enough, in spite of the agitation and disturbance suffered by the natural inclinations, to bring back complete calm, peace, and comfort to the heart, from which the words, "Lord, thy will be done" banish all disquiet. On the other hand, one whose conscience is not in good order is so distracted by the least suffering that he cannot be consoled, unless the suffering is taken away from him. Therefore it remains true that the peace of a good conscience is the true joy of the heart, even in the midst of the trials of this life. The words of the Holy Ghost must be true : "Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad" (Prov. 12 : 21).

II. No one is so innocent and pious as to escape rash judgments and injurious talk. Let one be as pure as Joseph, as devout as the mother of Samuel, as penitent as St. Peter, as zealous as St. Paul, as holy as our Lord himself ; yet he will find some evil-disposed person to bring suspicion on his purity, his piety, his zeal, his holiness. A single word from wicked tongues is often enough to turn love into hatred, friendship into enmity, even between the most intimate friends and relations, brothers and sisters, children and parents, husbands and wives, who otherwise would live in the greatest harmony with each other. A single word of scorn or contempt, uttered through malice or levity against another's actions, is often enough to ruin the reputation and credit of the best and most honorable of men, and to take from him the repose, joy, consolation, and pleasure he before enjoyed. In God's name, why do you concern yourselves so much about the affairs of other people ? Look to yourselves and your own souls, which you utterly neglect and ruin by your wicked tongues. Leave others in peace. Think of the terrible judgment to come, when you will have to give an account, not of your neighbor's actions, but of your own.

The best defence against talkative tongues is to let them say

what they will, to keep silent, laugh at them, treat their calumnies with contempt, and not do them the honor of taking the least notice of them. And that means you can best employ if you have a good conscience, which does not reproach you with any sin. Let your conscience be your comfort. Serve God sincerely, live uprightly, do your duty to the best of your ability ; fulfil the obligations of a good Christian ; and then you will find comfort enough in yourself, and you will even rejoice and be undisturbed in the midst of the barking of malicious tongues, since you are free in conscience, and with St. Augustine you will be able to say : "Think of Augustine whatever you please, as long as my conscience does not accuse me before God." What do I care for the judgments and opinions of men, since my conscience alone can make me good or wicked, condemn or absolve me ? If I know in my conscience that I have nothing good in me, the outward praise of men cannot bring me joy or comfort ; if I know in my conscience that I have nothing to be ashamed of, their blame cannot cause me reasonable fear or annoyance. If all those who know me praise me as a just and upright man, what consolation will that give me, if I am aware that I do not possess those virtues, and my conscience reproaches me saying : that is not true ; you do not deserve that praise ; if I have any sense of decency left, that praise should rather put me to shame and confusion.

If I have a good conscience, I have no reason for fear or anxiety, and can afford to pay little heed to what people say of me; for how could I reasonably dread losing my good name by such talk, when my conscience does not accuse me of anything that I should be ashamed of ? If I have a good conscience, I can let people say of me what they will; I can afford to despise all calumnies and detractions, and to treat them as contemptuously as I do the dog that barks at me in the street; for they cannot make me other than I am, and consequently can do me no harm. What harm is done to the sun by reproaching it falsely with having dark spots ? Or to the rich man to be accused of being poor ? All that talk will not cause the sun to lose a particle of its light, or the rich

man to be a whit the poorer. The praise of others does not make me better or holier than I really am; nor does their contempt make me worse. I am neither better nor worse than I am in the sight of God. If my conscience tells me that I am good and innocent, then I remain good and innocent, even if the whole world were full of envious tongues trying to run me down. If, then, I hear that wicked people are speaking ill of me, and saying things that I know to be false, why should I be disturbed thereat or give way to anger against them? What would I gain thereby? Would I thus make what is said of me more false than it is already? Who is angry at seeing dung come forth from a stable? Who is vexed because a dunghill gives forth a bad smell? Who troubles himself because, as he is passing by a lunatic asylum, the inmates jeer and laugh at him? If he is a sensible man he will laugh at them. Now from calumnious tongues nothing but filth and dung can come, and it should be a matter of indifference to me that they vomit forth follies like the lunatics.

Oh, what a beautiful thing it is to have a pure conscience in the sight of God; one that can be reproved with nothing bad unless through folly and falsehood on the part of the accusers; which is pleased and satisfied in itself and can rejoice in its own praise without having to fear either the talk or the scorn of others! This is the boast of the Apostle St. Paul to the Corinthians: "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you;" that is the least of my troubles; I pay not the slightest attention to the judgments and opinions of men regarding myself: "Our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity of heart and sincerity of God, and not in carnal wisdom, but in the grace of God, we have conversed in this world" (2. Cor. 2: 12). I have not injured or troubled any one; the duties that God has laid on me I have fulfilled; now go and say, or think of me, what you will: "To me it is a very little thing to be judged by you;" "Our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience."

That is the wonderful example that Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, has left to all his followers and true Christians. If there

ever was a holy and innocent man on earth it was Jesus Christ, in whom there was nothing that could be reproved or found fault with. Yet if ever there was any one in the world who had to suffer from evil, wicked, lying tongues, it was our Lord.

Let us, then, my dear brethren, carefully observe what St. Peter exhorts us to: "Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, they may be ashamed who falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." If you have to suffer innocently from wicked tongues, you ought to rejoice that you are innocent; and since your conscience tells you that you are free from what you are accused of, you have rather reason to exult on account of the words of our Lord: "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for your reward is very great in heaven" (Matt. 5: 11).

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE JOY OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE ON ACCOUNT OF ONE'S GOOD WORKS.

"*Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?*" *Matt.* 8: 26.

What have you to be afraid of, since I am in the boat with you? "Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?" My dear brethren, the peace of heart in a good conscience, by which we have God as our friend, is a continual joyful marriage-feast for the human soul, and brings true joy of heart even in the midst of trials and calamities, and under calumny. Now there are souls, and even pious souls, who are never content with themselves, and are either unable or unwilling to enjoy the peace and happiness of a good conscience. They are always filled with anguish, and think that they cannot flatter themselves with having a good conscience, or else if they have no reasonable grounds for doubting that they are in the state of grace, and they try to serve God as well as

they can, they imagine that they dare not admit any sense of pleasure or satisfaction in their good conscience, or in the service they render to God ; and in that they are misled by a false idea that it is more pleasing to God for them to attach no value to what they do for him and more advantageous to their souls to be always in a state of fear and trembling when working out their salvation. What a strange idea that is ! "Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith ?" I mean to convince you of quite the contrary.

I. He who has a good conscience, which does not reproach him with grievous sin, and who tries to serve God honestly, does what is most pleasing to God when he rejoices in the peace and satisfaction of his good conscience and on account of his good works.

II. He will derive great advantage for his soul from it.

I. God is more pleased and satisfied with a cheerful, joyous service than with a sad and melancholy one, and with a confident, child-like love, than a slavish fear. God, who loves us as a father loves his children ; who wishes us to call him Father, and to honor him as our Father ; cannot be pleased with the man who serves him with fear and anxiety as a hard task-master, and who peforms all his good works with unwillingness, distrust, and fear, and prays to him in sadness and bitterness of heart. The servants of God must not wait on their Lord with sadness and through compulsion, but with pleasure and satisfaction : "Not with sadness nor of necessity : for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2.Cor. 9 : 7). He is pleased with the servant who obeys him with joy and readiness. If I love God, why should I not rejoice at having done a good work conformable to his will and law, and therefore agreeable and pleasing to him ? Could there be a greater joy for a poor mortal in this vale of tears than to please such a mighty Lord, and to think as our Lord said of himself: "I do always the things that please him ?" (John 8 : 29.) What joy it must have been for David to hear king Saul say: "Behold thou

pleasest the king, and all his servants love thee" (1. Kings 18 : 22). Urged on by those words he went at once to risk his life among the Philistines, of whom he slew two hundred, and brought the trophies of his victory to the king, to gain still more of his good opinion; but much more was David pleased to learn that he was dear to God and a man after God's own heart. Must not a soul then have far greater satisfaction when it can think that it has pleased and gratified the King of kings by its good works? O men of the world, think and judge of me as you wish; talk of my actions as you please; hate or love me as best suits your fancies; if I succeed in pleasing my God, I should be more than satisfied; I should rejoice at it above all. And I know that this very joy is agreeable to God. Hear what he himself says to a pious soul: Go, then, and eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with gladness: because thy works please God (Eccles. 9 : 7).

Can any of you deny that I do what is pleasing to God when I think with sorrow and contrition of the sins with which my conscience reproaches me for having offended against the divine law and provoked the anger of God? Is there any doubt that this sorrow is so agreeable to him that, although he has not the least need of me, yet in virtue of this repentance, even if it lasts only for a moment, provided it is perfect, he pardons at once all my sins, no matter how grievous they are? He makes me his friend, his child, forgets forever the insults I have offered him, and prepares for me his favors and graces in this life, and a new degree of eternal glory in heaven. Why, then, should I not please God by rejoicing with peace and consolation of heart at the good works that my conscience tells me I have done, by which I have fulfilled the divine law and shown due respect and honor to God?

Again, it is an act of the most perfect virtue and excellent charity, to rejoice when we see that others honor and love God. Now I ask any sensible man, if I cannot rejoice, and have not just reason for rejoicing, when I see that I myself have done something for the honor and glory of God? If I must be glad of the good works of others, because God is honored thereby

why should I not be glad of my own, since God is honored by them too? Must I take less interest in the honor I give to God than in that given him by others? But that would be against all rules of sound reason, and contrary to the order of true charity. My underclothing is nearer to me than my cloak; I am nearer to myself than others are, and hence it would be contrary to order to rejoice in the good of another and not in my own. The end for which I have been sent into the world is to serve God, to avoid sin, and by doing good works to gain heaven. If I have hitherto kept this before my mind, if I find in the evening that I have not committed sin during the day, that I have fulfilled the duties of my state properly and with a good intention, and borne my daily crosses with patience and meekness, and have performed other good works: why should I not rejoice and be glad that I have served God according to my duty: why should I not thank him, and at the same time congratulate myself that he has deigned to use me as an instrument for his service, that he has helped me with his grace, that I have done something to please him? Yes, I will say or think to myself: Thank God! this day has been well spent; there is no grievous sin on my conscience; I have loved my God; I love him still; I will continue to love him; and if death should come to me this night, I am prepared for it; my conscience is good, and heaven will be my portion if I die. "In peace in the self-same I will sleep, and I will rest" (Ps. 4 : 9); with joy shall I lie down to rest and sleep peacefully in honor of God. Hence it is a praiseworthy thing and pleasing to God to be at peace with one's conscience and to rejoice on account of this peace and on account of one's good works.

II. Joy in our good works is a very useful thing, for it encourages us to serve God; but sadness hinders the divine service. Why? You are teaching reading or writing to a little boy; the child is most diligent and does his best to make the letters according to the pattern shown him. Now stand beside him, and do nothing but shake your head and find fault, and tell him that he has done noth-

ing but make mistakes. The poor child gets quite nervous, takes another piece of paper, begins to write again, and brings the same copy to you three, four, or five times; but you never have a word of praise for him; each time you tear up the paper and throw it away. How long do you think will that last? And what progress do you expect to make with your system of teaching? Do you think you will make the child more earnest and diligent? Not at all! The boy will lose heart at length, and despairing of ever being able to learn to write, will throw down pen and paper. If you wish to teach your pupil well and quickly, you must adopt another plan. Praise the child frequently, especially when he does his best; good! you must say; that is excellent; if you go on like that, you will soon be perfect. Then you will see how joyfully and eagerly he will set to work. And that is quite natural, not only with children, but also with grown up, sensible people.

So too, it is with the affair of our salvation and the divine service. The crafty tempter is well aware of this, and he conquers by sadness those whom he cannot ensnare in any other way. How does he manage that? He tries to persuade souls that are otherwise desirous of salvation to look on all they do as useless, and to interpret all their own actions in a bad sense, to consider their devotions as no devotions at all, their piety as mere illusion, and always to condemn themselves as if they never did any good whatever, and that under the pretext of a false humility. His object is to make them anxious and despairing, to take away their zeal in the divine service, and to drive them at last to grow careless and to seek consolation from creatures.

1. On the other hand, common sense tells us that as in worldly affairs success, besides the joy it gives, inspires us also with fresh courage to continue our efforts, so also in spiritual matters a peaceful conscience that rejoices in past efforts to serve God, gives us fresh zeal and courage, and thus pushes on the pious soul, like a miser who the more he has the more he wants, to a holy avarice and greed of multiplying good works and merits, and daily adding to its stock of spiritual treasures.

Again, this joy brings also this advantage to the Christian soul, that it avoids with the utmost care, not merely great sins and their occasions, but even deliberate venial sin, that it may keep its peace undisturbed, and avoid the least offence against God, in whom it is so well pleased. By that joy the soul offers its due meed of gratitude to God for the graces received, for it takes them with cheerful heart and countenance from the hands of God ; while another receives indeed the same graces, but with fear and dread because it is pusillanimous. Nay, since the latter dares not look on any of its works as good, it can neither appreciate the benefits bestowed on it by God, nor be duly thankful for them. Now if I make a present to a man, I like to see him accept it with pleasure, and thus to show that he values it.

2. That joy preserves in the soul an inward repose, contentment, and patience in all the trials and crosses of this life ; for it knows that such things come from the decrees of the Lord whom it serves, no matter what their immediate origin may be. Therefore it enjoys an incomparable peace when it remembers its good conscience and good works, which comfort it with the assurance that it stands well with God, and that although it has to suffer here yet it will one day rejoice with God in heaven on account of having served him zealously. Poor souls ! who do not know how to rejoice in the Lord, who think that you ought never regard your actions or the state of your conscience with satisfaction ! how I pity you when the cross is laid on your shoulders ! Where can you go for consolation ? You find none in temporal joys ; for they are taken from you by trials ; nor in heaven, which you are afraid of, and despair of ever reaching ; nor in God, for you cannot persuade yourselves to look on him as your well-meaning friend ; nor in yourselves and your own conscience, which you always look on as bad, and never as good. Thus you deprive yourselves of all the consolation which could help you to bear your crosses with patience.

3. Finally, that joy causes in the soul the most excellent of vir-

tues, *the perfect love of God;* for it is certain that a happy, cheerful mind is much more apt to feel the sweet affections of love than the doubting, timorous heart, which is distracted with all kinds of sad imaginings ; and the soul must have a special love for the Spouse who treats it so intimately, and gives it such repose and consolation. From this comes *perfect resignation to the will of God,* with which it submits itself to his fatherly hands in life and death, that he may do with it as he pleases. For as it is comforted by its good conscience, it has nothing to fear in life or death; and it lives and dies assured of eternal happiness, of which it has already had a foretaste in this world. Can any one doubt then that such joy is desirable and agreeable, since it brings so many advantages to the soul, and makes the way to all the virtues easy and safe?

Let pious Christians rejoice, then, in their good consciences. Let them rejoice in life and death without fear, and humbly congratulate themselves and thank the Almighty for the sins that have been forgiven them, for those that they have avoided, and for the faithful service they have rendered God. And when that consoling joy makes itself felt, let them not refuse to entertain it, but rather dilate their minds and hearts, so as to receive still more of it. Sinners, come, ah, come back ! Hear the merciful Saviour crying out to you : "Take up my yoke upon you." He is most desirous of your salvation ; do penance and cast from you the heavy burden of your sins, and you shall see what a great change for the better that will be. "You shall find rest to your souls."

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE LAWFULNESS OF JOY OF CONSCIENCE ON ACCOUNT OF GOOD WORKS.

"*But the wheat gather ye into my barn.*" *Matt.* 13 : 30.

The weeds represent bad, the wheat good works. The weeds go into the fire, the wheat into the barn. What different expressions of countenance there will be seen on the last day, when the

wicked shall be sent to hell on account of their evil deeds, and the good shall be invited by their Judge to enter heaven on account of their good works. Rejoice confidently in the Lord, you who have a good conscience. That joy is most pleasing to God and very beneficial to your souls; for God requires a cheerful service from us, and that joy is the best encouragement to the soul to continue serving God and practising virtue. Now let us hear what might be said against this. That joy, by which we exult in our good conscience and in our good works, seems to run counter to the Christian virtue of humility, which is so necessary to all men, and by which we must have a mean opinion of ourselves, and run counter to the example of the Saints, who followed an entirely different plan; But I say

I. *Joy harmonizes easily with true Christian humility;*

II. *It harmonizes easily with the examples of humility given us by the holy servants of God.*

I. Is it not presumption, secret vanity, and self-complacency to admire one's own good works, approve of them, think them worthy of praise, take pleasure in them, rejoice at them, and centre one's delight and satisfaction in them? What else is that but placing one's self in the proximate occasion of becoming proud and conceited, as if one had done extraordinarily great things? Is it not taking occasion from one's good works to become slothful in the divine service, like that rich man, who said to himself: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thy rest, eat, drink, and make good cheer?" (Luke 12: 19.) Would not a man be exposed to the same danger, who sets himself to consider the good works he has performed with a pure conscience during his life, and takes pleasure in them? Might not he, too, exclaim: My soul, behold thou art in a good state; thou hast done much good, and gathered many treasures for heaven with thy zeal? Rest now; make good cheer; thou hast labored enough, and canst now enjoy thyself?

Quite different to that was the conduct of pious and holy men who wished to save their souls and get to heaven after death! They had a mean opinion of themselves and of all their actions. Although they avoided with the utmost care the least shadow of sin, yet they looked on themselves as poor sinners; nay, they both thought and proclaimed themselves to be the greatest sinners in the whole world. Perfect and wonderful were their virtuous works; yet, they thought they had done nothing for heaven; so far were they from looking on them as deserving of praise, and often did they find fault with them, although in reality there was nothing in them that could be condemned. Let us take only one example. What a holy man Job was! God himself says that he had no servant on earth like Job. What a virtuous man he was in prosperity! "I was clad with justice," he says of himself, "and I clothed myself with my judgment, as with a robe and a diadem. I was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame. I was the father of the poor" (Job 29: 14—16). How patient he was in misfortunes and sufferings of body and soul! How submissively he accepted those crosses from the hands of God, and in the midst of them praised and blessed his God with an undisturbed mind! And yet what an opinion he had of himself! "I feared all my works," he said with humility. "If I would justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me" (Job 9: 28, 20). Job dares not to speak to God of his justice; and shall I flatter myself with the idea that I am leading a holy life, and indulge in that thought with pleasure, satisfaction, and joy? Oh, no! let me only have a mean opinion of myself and be always afraid!

I acknowledge that this objection is a specious one, yet if we take it in the right sense it will not militate against the truth, that we can and with reason must rejoice at the good works of which our conscience says to us that they were performed according to the will of God. And to answer the first question; if that joy were vanity, idle boasting, or presumption, then we should have reason to accuse David, that man after God's own heart, of being vain, boastful, and presumptuous; for in many of the psalms,

especially in the 118th, he recounts before God, to his own great consolation, how he kept himself free from sin, and observed the divine law. If that joy is vanity, then Exechias, one of the holiest kings of Juda, could be accused of vainglory and presumption, for when he was at the point of death he spoke to God thus confidently: "I beseech thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight;" a prayer that was so pleasing to God that he spared the king's life for fifteen years (Is. 38 : 3). If that joy is vanity, then St. Paul was a boastful, vain, presumptuous man, for the greatest joy of his life was in his good conscience, according to his own words: "Our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience" (2. Cor. 1 : 12). And what was the testimony of his conscience? It was in that that he placed all his joy and glory. If that joy is vanity, then Job himself was vain and presumptuous, when his friends came to comfort him in his misery as he sat on the dung-hill, and attributed his calamities to his sins; for he told them how he had led an innocent life, and found his consolation in the thought of it: "If I shall be judged, I know that I shall be found just" (Job. 13 : 18). Hear how he rejoices at the future reward in store for him; although I am now a man of sorrows and abandoned by all, "I know that my Redeemer liveth . . . and in my flesh I shall see my God. Whom I myself shall see and my eyes shall behold; . . . this my hope is laid up in my bosom" (Job 19 : 25—27). But it would be the height of presumption to accuse those holy men and many others like them of vanity and boasting.

It would indeed be vanity if one were to publish his good works, and the graces and gifts bestowed on his soul, in order to gain the praise and esteem of men, as the Pharisees did. It would be self-conceit if one were to think himself better than others, or to despise them on account of his good works. It would be presumption if I were to ascribe to myself and my own powers the good I do. It would be presumption if I were to pretend, either to myself or to others, that my actions are so good and perfect

that they could not be done better, and that the least fault or defect cannot be found in them. But to live in peace, consolation, and joy when our conscience tells us that we have hitherto avoided sin ; to rejoice that we do nothing against God ; to rejoice when we do good, because we thus fulfil our obligations, do the will of God, and please and honor him thereby ; to consider our good works and be glad on account of them, thus exciting ourselves to renewed zeal in the divine service, to greater patience in adversity, and to a firmer confidence in God, to consider our good works, and offer due thanks to God for them as for a great benefit ; no one could look on that as vanity, or seeking for praise, and still less as presumption. That is acting reasonably, sensibly, and judging of the matter as it really is in itself ; that is truly rejoicing in the Lord.

II. No matter what good we do, we should never grow proud, but be always humble, like the Saints : at the same time, however, we should rejoice in our good works.

1. *To say that the Saints always condemned and thought nothing of their good works is not true.* It is very true that in spite of their holy lives they had a mean and low opinion of themselves; it is the opinion we must all have of ourselves, remembering that everything that is good and praiseworthy in us comes from above from the generous hand of the Lord. Although St. Paul rejoices in his good conscience and in the works he performed for the glory of God, yet he humbly ascribed all, not to himself alone, but to the grace of God working with him : "By the grace of God I am what I am ; and his grace in me hath not been void, but I have labored more abundantly than all they : yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (1. Cor. 15 : 10). It is one thing to have a good opinion of myself and another to take pleasure in and esteem my works when they are good and according to the will of God; and that distinction we must carefully observe; for while the latter joy is praiseworthy the former is altogether unjustifiable.

2. *But the holy servants of God have always looked on themselves*

and publicly proclaimed themselves as sinners. That is true, and they were perfectly right; for we can and must look on ourselves as sinners, no matter what we are. Why? Because we can sin; because our corrupt nature always inclines us to sin; because we commit small sins at least nearly every day. If I have committed but one mortal sin in my life, I have reason to think and say of myself, no matter how holy I may be, that I am the greatest sinner in the world, considering the great light and grace given to me, and the gifts bestowed on me so generously by God, in preference to so many others. If even the vilest wretch had the graces, lights, and impulses to good which I enjoy, he would serve God much more zealously than I do; and St. Augustine says we must look on all the sins from which God preserves us as if we had been forgiven them. Yet pious servants of God, who humbly acknowledged that truth, must still have been greatly rejoiced that they repented of and were forgiven their former sins; nor is there any doubt that they thanked, with joyful and loving hearts, the divine Mercy, which bore with them so patiently, and did not permit them to die and be lost in the miserable state of sin, freeing them in time from the slavery of the devil and bringing them to the liberty of the children of God. Although St. Paul acknowledges and professes himself to be the greatest sinner in the world; "Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief" (1. Tim. 1 : 15); and again: "For I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God" (1. Cor. 15 : 9); yet that consideration did not deprive him of the joy, peace, and glory resulting from his good conscience and from the services he rendered to God.

3. *In spite of all their good works the Saints thought they did little or nothing for God and heaven.* Quite true, and again quite right also; even St. Paul who rejoiced so much in his good conscience, says: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8: 18). All imaginable trials that can afflict us in this life are not worthy

of being named even, when compared to the glory that God has promised us as a reward for them. But is that a reason for not rejoicing at the trials we bear? Rather the contrary. For instance: there is a magnificent property worth fifty thousand dollars; the owner of it gives it to you for one dollar because he has a liking for you; now if you are asked what you paid for that property, oh, you exclaim, the price is not worth mentioning; it has cost me only a dollar. Meanwhile you rejoice, and with good reason, at having gained possession of such a valuable property for so small a sum. So, too, should it be with us. There is not a doubt that all our efforts, even if we were to labor without intermission till the last day, are very small, worthless, nay, nothing, compared to the reward we have to expect for them. Our labor lasts a very short time; our reward in heaven will be eternal. And the same thought should make us rejoice during this life, and give us all the more courage in the divine service; namely, that God requires so little from us for his eternal heaven, for his everlasting rewards. Should I not rejoice when I think: I have done some good, only a little, it is true; but it is what God required of me; it is what he wished me to do in order to reward me eternally for it?

Therefore, the practice of sensible, pious, and holy people, instead of condemning, rather encourages the feeling of contentment, the consoling joy that we have in our good works and in the service we have rendered our Lord and God. I say sensible people; for I know well that there are some innocent souls who indeed live piously, but are always frightened and anxious, as if everything they do were bad. They fear sin where there is no sin. Why should I be afraid of a dog, when there is none in sight? Why should I be afraid of evil in that which my conscience cannot condemn as evil? If I wish to act sensibly, I should fear what is to be feared; but I should also praise and approve of what is good and praiseworthy.

My dear brethren, let us be sorry that we have ever offended the good God by the sins that our conscience tells us that we have been guilty of in the past; let us fear offending God in

future by even one sin ; and let us endeavor during the present time to love God with our whole hearts, and to do his holy will in all things. Beyond that there is nothing to cause us either fear or anxiety. If we do that we can be always peaceful, satisfied, and joyful, even because we serve the Lord. Oh, would that all men sought their joy and pleasure in the divine service ! They would certainly find rest to their souls. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE CONFORMITY OF JOY OF CONSCIENCE WITH THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD.

"*But when it is grown up it is greater than all herbs*," *Matt.* 13 : 32.

The good works that we perform for God's sake may well be likened to the grain of mustard-seed ; considered in themselves they are utterly insignificant, but when after a happy death, in the state of grace, we are able to produce them before our Judge, oh to what glory and happiness they will increase in heaven ! I showed in the last sermon that a peaceful joy on account of our good works harmonizes with Christian humility and a mean opinion of one's self, and also with the example given us by the Saints. There is still one thing that might disturb the repose and peace of conscience of the good Christian, and make that joy and self-congratulation on account of his good conscience and good works suspicious in his eyes : I mean the word of God, in the following three pages : "When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say : We are unprofitable servants" (Luke 17 : 10).

2. "Be not without fear about sin forgiven" (Ecclus. 5 : 5). "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2 : 12). But be not disturbed, pious Christians, who have a good conscience and serve God ! I will now explain away those apparently

terrible words to your consolation, and prove to your entire satisfaction that

The joy of a good conscience on account of one's good works is not contrary to Holy Scripture.

Our Lord says: "*When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants.*" What is the meaning of "unprofitable servants"? Must we say that we are wicked servants? But he is not a wicked servant who does all that his master commands him. We read elsewhere: "You are my friends if you do the things I command you." Must we then think and say that we are at all events not good servants, and that we do no good? But how then will he be able one day to say to me with truth, if I persevere to the end doing all that he requires of me: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things"? (Matt. 25 : 21.) Did his disciples do no good when they fulfilled all his commands? But if they did what they were bound to do, surely they did some good; for they could not be bound to do evil; therefore since they knew that they did what they were bound to do, they knew also that they did good, and must necessarily have formed a good opinion of it. My dear brethren, when we have obeyed the law of God we must not think, much less say, that we are wicked servants, nor should we think or say that we are not good servants; but we should say: "We are unprofitable servants." That word "unprofitable" can be explained in three ways.

1. We must remember that our holiest and most perfect works, considered in themselves as they proceed from us, and in their own nature, are worth nothing in the sight of God, nor in the least degree meritorious of a supernatural reward; for they must receive all their value from the merits of Christ, from sanctifying grace by which they are raised above their nature, and receive, as

it were, a sort of divine property ; so that God in consideration of this value given them by Christ, accepts our works as good, and gives us his friendship and heaven as a reward for them. Perhaps you will understand it better by means of a simile. A prince promises or commands his chamberlain to give all those who present a note signed by his own hand and seal a hundred dollars. Now I present my petition ; the prince signs and seals it ; it becomes as valuable to me at once as a hundred dollars ; for that sum will certainly be paid me when I present the note to the proper authorities. Why ? The note I bring is indeed nothing more than a worthless piece of paper in itself ; but since it has the prince's seal and signature it becomes very valuable. So, too, it is with the good works that we perform in the state of sanctifying grace, which are so many notes that we present to God. In themselves they are not at all deserving of a supernatural reward ; but Christ sets his seal to them by sanctifying grace, and our heavenly Father signs them, binding himself to accept them as of great value, and to give us a rich reward for them, if we can produce them after death. In that sense, my dear brethren, we can and must acknowledge that we are unprofitable servants, although we have done all that we were commanded to do, because of ourselves we have done nothing deserving of a supernatural reward.

2. In the second place, we must not consider ourselves as profitable servants of the Lord, although we have done all that he has commanded, in the sense that we thereby make a valuable present to God, or bestow on him some favor or grace, for which he is bound to thank us and to prove his gratitude. That such is the meaning of the words of our Lord is clear from the whole passage. For in the same place he asks his disciples : "Doth he thank that servant for doing the things which he commanded him ?" And he himself answers : "I think not" (Luke 17 : 9, 10). And then he continues : "So you also when you shall have done all those things that are commanded you, say : We are unprofitable servants : we have done that which we ought to do." He

would indeed be a stupid servant who would think he does his master a favor by waiting at table and handing round the dishes, and expect his master to thank him for that! He should wait a long time before being thanked for merely doing his duty; he is there to attend on his master. Much less should we when we do anything to please the great God, imagine that we have done great things; for as the Lord of the universe he has the right to demand our services when, where, and how he pleases, without giving us any reward therefor. And moreover he has not the least need of them, not like earthly masters, who would be in an evil plight if their servants abandoned them altogether. What does God want with my works? Whether I praise and serve him or not will not in the least interfere with his happiness. Therefore I can and must look on myself as an unprofitable servant, who does nothing but what he already owes his Lord on countless titles.

3. Unprofitable servants means as much as servants without work; idle servants; we have no more work, because we have done what we were told to do. We are like the laborer who is hired by the day to work as he is ordered. When he comes in the morning his master says: take the axe and cut up the wood you see lying there. The man sets to work, and in two or three hours he has finished it. What must he do now? Is he to lie down and say to himself: I have done what I was told; or must he go away home?

No; he is hired for the whole day; so he goes to the master and says: I have finished cutting the wood, what else am I to do? So Christ warns his disciples and all his servants, saying to them: when you have done all that you are commanded to do, you must not imagine that you are to serve me no more, and that you can now idle away your time. No, you are hired by your heavenly Master for the whole day; that is, you must serve him your whole lives long, and do his will, if you wish to gain heaven. Therefore you must say: we are unprofitable servants. Present yourselves before the Lord always willing to obey him; say to him: we are now idle;

we have done what was commanded us ; tell us now what more thou desirest us to do. And this harmonizes excellently with true joy and consolation on account of good works ; nay, to await new commands from our Lord in that way is a clear sign of a cheerful, well-disposed mind, that is ready to do all that God wishes.

"*Be not without fear about sin forgiven ;*" those are the other words of the Holy Ghost. They are to be understood either of past sins, or of future sins that may still be committed. In the first case, why should I fear that my sins are not forgiven ? We cannot think without blasphemy that the Holy Ghost contradicts himself, since he speaks of forgiven sin. But if it is forgiven, how could he wish me to fear that it is not ? Must I be afraid that I have offended God thereby ? But there is no reason to fear that ; that was done when the sin was committed ; that is what I have repented of, and what I am still sorry for. Must I fear that God will condemn me for it ? Truly he can punish me in purgatory, if I do not fully satisfy for it here, and in that sense I have reason to fear on account of sin that is forgiven ; but he will not and cannot condemn me to hell for it, since he cannot break his word. If I were to sin again and to die without doing penance, I should be lost forever on account of this last sin, but should not have my sufferings increased in the least on account of my former forgiven sins, even if there were a hundred thousand of them ; they are to remain blotted out for eternity. So that the text must be understood of sins that I might commit in future, and the meaning of it is : O sinner, you have experienced the goodness and mercy of God ; he has pardoned your grievous transgressions because you have humbled yourself before him with contrite heart, and have candidly confessed them ; he will never think of those sins again ; but do not therefore be without fear ; do not live so carelessly as you have hitherto done ; avoid sin with the utmost care, and do not imagine that you can make little of it, because it is so easy to obtain forgiveness from the divine mercy. This is clearly the meaning of those words, as appears from the context : "Say not : I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me" (Ecclus 5 : 4). I have confessed my sins, paid off

my debts; I can commence to contract fresh debts. I shall sin again, and again repent; and I shall find forgiveness again from the good and merciful God as easily as before. But that will not do; for the Scripture adds: "Be not without fear about sin forgiven, and add not sin upon sin. And say not: the mercy of the Lord is great, he will have mercy on the multitude of my sins; because easy as it is for the merciful God to pardon, it is just as easy for him to give free rein to his anger; his patience at last changes into wrath and indignation: "For mercy and wrath quickly come from him, and his wrath looketh upon sinners" (Ecllus 5 : 9). But this fear of offending God need not hinder me from enjoying the comfort that arises from my repentance, by which I have blotted out my former sins, and changed my bad conscience into a peaceful and good one.

We can work out our salvation with fear, and yet rejoice in the Lord. Finally, a terrible thunder-bolt is launched from the pen of St. Paul: "With fear and trembling work out your salvation." But the same Apostle placed all his joy and glory in his good conscience and good works, and rejoiced in them to such an extent that his heart was too small to contain the happiness he felt. Therefore he says openly before the world: "I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation" (2. Cor. 7 : 4). Is it possible, I ask myself, that the vessel of election, St. Paul, did not work out his salvation? And yet he did not always tremble with fear, but rather exult with joy, and that, too, although he had been a great sinner and persecutor of the Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore I can work out my salvation, and at the same time rejoice in the Lord precisely because I am working out my salvation.

Thus the fear is directed to the future, and not to the past or the present; and thus the two things harmonize admirably. For we can rejoice that we must have hitherto kept the right road to heaven, that we are actually working out our salvation; and at the same time we can be cautious and fearful lest we should ever wander away from the right path. We rejoice in our hearts that our con-

science does not accuse us of any grievous sin ; yet we will be most careful in the future, lest we should sully our conscience by sin ; we will tremble at the very shadow of sin. We rejoice at heart that we have hitherto served the God whom we love, and still continue to serve him according to our duty ; but at the same time we will use the utmost diligence to be faithful in his service for the remainder of our lives.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE MARKS OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

"Call the laborers and pay them their hire." *Matt.* 20 : 8.

The only thing that sweetens the workman's toil is the hope of the wages he is to receive for it in the evening when his work is done. As long as we live, we are hired to work for the great Master ; we are laborers, whose only end is to serve God, to love God, to keep God's law, and to do his holy will in all things. The wages we are to receive at evening, that is, at the end of our lives, for this labor is eternal happiness in heaven. Oh, who will not work willingly for the short, uncertain time of his life to gain such a recompense ! Yet we have such a good and generous God that he will not allow his faithful servants to wait till the end of their lives for their reward ; but in the midst of their labors, during this life, he gives them a notable portion of the future reward, namely, peace of heart, a sweet repose of conscience, and joy in and on account of the work they are actually doing for him. Yes, some will think : all that has been said of a good conscience is indeed consoling and comforting for those who have a good conscience ; and I, too, would willingly rejoice in the Lord, if I only knew that I am in the state of grace, that I really have a good conscience. But who can tell me that ? That question I am now about to answer.

He who wishes to know whether he really has a good conscience must ask his own conscience about it; for that will certainly tell him whether it is good or bad.

The conscience is a judge placed over men by the Almighty in his stead, to pronounce finally on their actions whether good or bad. Whatever the sentence of that judge may be, God ratifies it, and rejects as bad what the conscience condemns as bad and approves as good what it approves of. If I satisfy my conscience, I satisfy God; if my conscience accuses me, I am guilty before God. If my conscience does not accuse or condemn me, neither will God accuse, or condemn me. Therefore the conscience is called the rule and guide to be followed in judging between good and evil; and I am bound to follow and obey it in all my actions to such an extent that if I act against my conscience I act against God, nor can I do anything good or pleasing to God, however good or pleasing to him the work may be in itself, unless my conscience first looks on it as good and pleasing to him; nor can I commit sin, although in reality I do something forbidden by the law of God, unless my conscience knows and reminds me that I am doing wrong, or at least suggests to me a reasonable doubt regarding the legality of my act. Thus I actually sin by doing a work that is good in itself and has nothing whatever wrong in it if my conscience erroneously judges, or gives me reasonable cause to doubt that act is unlawful; and I actually perform a good work, although what I do is really sinful, if my conscience assures me that the act is pleasing to God. Your conscience is nothing else than the reasonable, candid judgment that you form of your own actions. And with regard to the act you are about to perform, if you judge or think without any doubt that the act is a lawful one, you do it with a good conscience, and it is a good act; but if you judge, or have reasonable doubt, that it is not lawful, then you do it with a bad conscience, and commit a sin, no matter what the act may be in itself, whether it is good or bad, lawful or unlawful. From this it follows:

1. That the conduct of those people is most unreasonable, who after having done something about the lawfulness of which they had not the least doubt, are filled with fear and anguish afterwards because they happen to hear that it is a sin. Then it is all up with them! My God, they think, I have often done that and never confessed it! What shall I do? All my past confessions are bad! Nonsense! You cannot sin unless you know, or have a reasonable doubt, that what you are doing is sinful; but that knowledge or doubt, you had not at the time of the action. What is once done well and without sin cannot be made sinful by any knowledge gained afterwards. Why then should you worry yourself so much? If it was forbidden a thousand times, or was the worst sin that one could commit, ask your conscience what judgment it formed at the time, and if it says that was no sin, be quite at ease; you are not even bound to mention the act in confession, because it is not matter for absolution.

2. On the other hand, we see how great is the error of those who, having done what they falsely thought sinful, and finding out afterwards that the act is lawful, congratulate themselves, saying: oh, I am glad of that! I need not confess it now, because it appears it is not a sin. But do not be so sure of that; the sin is already committed, because you thought at the time that you were doing wrong; so that it remains a sin, although you know better now; and you must confess it and repent of it.

3. Thirdly, it follows that those parents and servants are very unwise who, to keep children in check or frighten them from evil, either tell them that things are sins which are no sins at all, or else make the sins greater than they are in reality. If the child throws away the bread after it has eaten the honey or butter, they cry out; you must not do that, or you will go to hell! Disobedience to parents or making a cross face is also condemned as a mortal sin. "Those naughty children who run about in the streets will go to hell." "Be careful not to tell a lie, for a lie is a mortal sin."

That is not the way, O parents, to instruct children! You must not make them believe that there are sins where there are none; nor make sins greater than they really are; otherwise you teach them to do evil; for when they come to the use of reason, since what they have heard so often remains fixed in their memories, and they look on those actions as sins, when they do them they act against their conscience and thus commit sin, although the act itself is not sinful. You must have recourse to other means to keep them in check; threaten them with the rod when they do wrong, and if they do not amend beat them soundly in God's name; that is not so dangerous for them, and will do them far more good than that senseless manufacturing of sins.

4. You have a bad conscience if, after diligent examination and with good reason, you judge on sufficient grounds and can say with truth: after Baptism I sinned grievously when I came to the use of reason, when I was fully aware that what I did was a mortal sin; and if you can moreover say that there is one of those mortal sins that you have not confessed, or not confessed properly. Or else if you can judge with good reason and say, with truth: I have now really a desire and wish to sin grievously against the law of God; or I am in doubt as to whether this or that is a mortal sin, and yet I do not intend to avoid it or amend my life in that respect. There you have a proof of a bad conscience, and if such is the case with you, you will not long have rest, if there is even a little of the fear of hell left in you, or a slight hope or desire of going to heaven. For therefrom comes the bitter sting, or, as it is called, the gnawing worm of conscience, which eats it away like a worm gnawing into an apple.

5. On the other hand, if after due consideration you can say: as far as I know, I have never omitted a grievous sin in confession; I have prepared myself for confession always as well as I could; I have repented with my whole heart of my sins; I am still very sorry for having ever grievously offended my good God; if I had

to live my life over again, I should never sin grievously. As far as I know, after that last mortal sin, I have never committed another. As far as I know, I have no ill-gotten goods and am not bound to restitution. I have hitherto tried to do the duties of my state according to the will and law of God ; I am willing and am firmly resolved to do them in future as long as I live, and never to offend God by a mortal sin, even if I had to lose all I have in the world. If you can say that with truth, then you can be certain with a human certainty, which will not admit of any reasonable doubt, that you have a good conscience and are in the state of grace.

6. This certainty becomes all the greater when you have good reason for believing, and can say to yourselves, that for a long time, some months, for instance, you have avoided all mortal sin. For it is a most difficult thing for one who is actually in mortal sin to abstain from committing fresh sins for any length of time. Hence, if you keep from grievous sin for a long time after having done penance, you have a good sign that you are in the grace of God.

7. Finally, do you not sometimes feel in your heart a fervent love of God, a desire to do something to please him and to serve him faithfully according to his holy will? Do you not feel an inward horror when you hear how recklessly men provoke God's anger? Are you not rejoiced to see people honoring him publicly? Do you not experience an inward sorrow when in the examination of your conscience you find that you have wilfully committed even a venial sin? Are you not uneasy until you have confessed it? That is another sure sign that you are in the state of grace, and are beloved by God. The Lord himself says : "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8 : 17). If I have committed even a hundred thousand million of sins, and make even for one moment an act of perfect charity, as David did when he said with a contrite heart : "I have sinned against the Lord" (2. Kings 12 : 13), all my sins are at once forgiven, and I am again beloved by God. Oh,"

exclaims St. Bernard, full of joy and consolation, "I am not afraid, because I love." Why? Because I am thereby assured that God loves me; "if I love God I can as little doubt that I am loved by him as I can that I love him." Now every one can find out all this with the utmost certainty from his own conscience, if he asks it to pronounce on the matter. For I can and must know whether I have wilfully sinned, or wilfully concealed a sin in confession; whether I truly repent of my sins and detest them; whether I love God with my whole heart, and am resolved to remain faithful to him for the rest of my life. And if any of you can reasonably and honestly form that judgment concerning himself, then I congratulate him with all my heart; he is all right; he has a good conscience; he is a friend, a dear child of God, and if he were to die now he would inherit the kingdom of heaven. Let him rejoice then in the Lord; let him be peaceful and satisfied, and thank the good God. Only one word of warning I would wish to say to him with the old Tobias: "Take heed thou never consent to sin, nor transgress the commandments of the Lord our God." If you are careful in that, there is no fear for you.

You are careful in your duties and employments; you daily trouble yourselves about many things, trying to avoid misfortune, and to attain success; ah, whatever you do, whatever you omit, whatever be your fears or hopes otherwise, be careful above all things to have a good conscience in the sight of God, and never to injure it!

Away then with the vain goods, honors, and pleasures of the world, in which you have hitherto fruitlessly sought happiness, rest and contentment of soul, and real joy of heart! You must acknowledge, with the wise Solomon, that in all these things you have found nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit. You have now learned something far better than all the world can teach you, and that is, always to rejoice with the true joy that consists in the Supreme Good; always to live in the true peace that the world cannot give; that peace which the Angels announced to the shepherds: "On earth peace to men of good will." That peace you find in your good conscience; if you have it, you can laugh at all earthly

happiness and prosperity, and at all earthly misfortune and distress as well; for no matter how things go with you, you shall find comfort and consolation in God your Lord.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE LOSS OF PEACE OF CONSCIENCE.

"*They who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience.*" *Luke* 8 : 15.

They are then faithful servants of God who keep the divine law in a good and very good heart, and bring forth fruit in patience; that is, in cheerful contentment of heart which they have from their good conscience. May peace of heart be and remain with you! For the sake of your salvation, never to disturb or interrupt this peace, which is the source of true joy in this valley of tears! I beg of you never to disturb it, because no angel in heaven, no devil in hell, no man on earth, no trouble or sorrow, can take this peace from you, unless you yourselves give it up of your own free will, by losing God through sin.

The loss of God, whom sin alone drives out of the conscience, disturbs the peace of the human heart; therefore if we wish to preserve this peace constantly we must fear and shun sin alone.

For the human heart to have rest and peace it must necessarily be and remain in the place appointed for it as its centre. What is the proper natural centre of the human heart? Nothing else but God alone. Just as the Creator has appointed the forests for beasts, the air for the birds, the water for fishes, their orbits for the planets, the firmament for the stars, so has he kept the human soul for himself alone. "Man," says St. Augustine, "is created to know the Supreme Good, and knowing, to love him, loving, to possess him." Thus it is in the Lord God alone that the human heart can

find true peace and repose. For if nothing in the world can give rest and peace to the heart but the possession of God in a good conscience, it follows as a matter of course that there is nothing in the world but the loss of God by a bad conscience which can interrupt and disturb this peace. Now it is by grievous sin that God is driven out of the conscience. As long as man is in the state of sanctifying grace he is united with God, and God with him, in the bonds of the most perfect friendship and love; so that not only does he belong to God completely and entirely, but God completely and entirely belongs to him; and he can say to God with truth, in the words of David: "I am thine, save thou me" (Ps. 118: 94). And also: Thou art mine, O Lord! Thou belongest to me! Nay, says St. Thomas of Villanova, there is no good on earth that he can call his own as much as the Supreme Good. "O man!" says the saint, "thou lovest what is thine; thy clothes, thy house, thy money; love thy God, too, for nothing is as much thine as he." But if you lose yourself so far as to consent to one mortal sin, though but in thought, then a thousand times unhappy man! Now and not till now is that bond of friendship and property between you and your God completely broken! You have lost your God and with him everything else! You may be poor and needy as far as the outward goods of this world are concerned; yet you can still say: I am thine; thou art mine! For poverty and want do not separate men from God. You may be weak and sickly, still can you say: I am thine; thou art mine, O God; for sickness does not separate you from God. You may be the most despised, abandoned, persecuted man on the face of the earth, still can you say: I am thine; thou art mine, O God! For contempt, desolation, persecution, and all calamities whatever be their names, do not separate men from God. There is nothing in heaven, on earth, or under the earth that can take God away from you except sin alone; sin is that wicked thief that robs you of God, the Supreme Good, and of everything else with him. Sin is a turning from God, by which the friendship of God with man, and that of man with God is turned into a deadly enmity.

How bitterly Saul complained to Samuel of this separation or rather expressed the despair it inspired him with! "I am in great distress," he said, "for the Philistines fight against me, and God is departed from me" (I. Kings 28 : 15), which is the most terrible of all. Michas had given hospitality to some strangers, who stole his idols when they went away; as soon as he found out the theft, he hurried after them, crying out aloud and filling the air with his lamentations. "What aileth thee?" they said to him. "Why dost thou cry?" Ah, said he, "you have taken away my gods, which I have made me, and the priest, and all that I have, and do you say: What aileth thee?" (Judges 18 : 23, 24.) With my gods you have taken away my goods; have I then not reason to cry and lament? How troubled king David was day and night, when his conscience reproached him with having lost God! "My tears have been my bread day and night: whilst it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?" (Ps. 12 : 4.) O sinner, see about you, look into your heart; "where is thy God?" You have him no longer. "God is departed from me," you can say with Saul. "You have taken away my God," you can say with Michas to the sins you have committed. Accursed avarice! wicked pride! wretched gluttony and drunkenness! wild desire of revenge! you have taken away my God and with him everything! And do you think that while your conscience thus stings you it is possible for you to enjoy repose and peace of heart? No, that cannot be; for how could you have peace when you have lost the Good that is your centre point and proper resting-place, which a natural impulse always urges you to seek? Although the soul leads a most wicked life, yet it always seeks God even in the midst of its sins. You imagine that you seek earthly treasures and riches by your avarice and injustice, the delights of the flesh by your impurity, the pleasures of sense by your gluttony. But you are mistaken; the chief good you seek in all these things is your repose and contentment, your welfare and satisfaction; but since this repose, contentment, welfare, and satisfaction can be found only in God, you seek God without knowing that

you do so; how then can you find rest when you seek God as the place of your rest, and at the same time lose him by sin?

What do I say, lose him? Before you got that far, when you were still thinking and deliberating as to whether you would do that sinful work, or not, even then rest and peace left your heart. I call all sinners to witness the truth of this. How did they feel when for the first time they began to yield to the allurements of some temptation, and to consent to grievous sin? What a fierce contest arose in their minds! The light of reason, faith, the Gospel law, the graces and illuminations received from God, represented to their minds the enormity and malice of sin, of the act they were about to accomplish; their conscience cried out: It is not lawful! you are on the point of making an enemy of God, who is looking at you, of losing your precious, immortal soul, of depriving yourself of heaven, of incurring the anger of God and the eternal torments of hell! Your own inborn sense of shame made you feel a repugnance to the vicious act.

Now if sin at its very first appearance can cause such painful anxiety to the heart, what will it not do when it is already committed; when the pleasure of it is past; when the satisfaction given to the evil inclinations has vanished; when the conscience cries out: wretched man, what have you done? You are a hated enemy of God, a bond-slave of the devil, a child of reprobation; and if you do not repent of your shameful act above every other evil in the world, and clearly confess it in the sacred tribunal to the priest, you art lost forever! Alas, what bitter stabs those are for the heart! Could any one enjoy peace and contentment under such circumstances? No, no. "There is no peace for the wicked," saith the Lord, who sees the heart and knows all that passes therein.

Ask our forefather *Adam* how he felt after having disobeyed the command of God. "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God, amidst the trees of Paradise" (Gen 3: 8). What is the matter with Adam? God has not even spoken to him yet, much less inflicted any punishment on him! Why are you

so fearful and anxious? The sin that he had on his conscience made him afraid. Ask the prophet Jonas how he felt after having gone to Tharsis in direct disobedience to the command of God. Hear how he accuses himself before the sailors in the ship, and blames himself for the storm that arose. But why did Jonas thus lay the blame on himself? None of the sailors had any suspicion of his guilt. Why did he not keep quiet and say nothing about it! No, the sin on his conscience gave him neither peace nor rest. Ask *Judas* how he felt when he had betrayed his divine Master, and delivered him into the hands of the Jews. Christ, having received his treacherous kiss, speaks to him with the greatest friendliness, and calls him friend: "Friend, whereto art thou come?" (Matt. 26 : 50.) Not one of the Apostles had uttered a word of reproof against him, and yet he went off filled with sadness, fear, and melancholy, until he put an end to himself to get rid of the intolerable pain.

Sinner, whoever you are, have you fared any better in your unhappy state? Have you enjoyed peace and repose of heart after having lost God from your conscience? Do you now experience real joy? No, that cannot be, and even if you affirmed it a hundred times on oath, I should not believe you, unless the long-continued habit of sin has, at last, hardened your conscience and rendered you obdurate; otherwise you cannot have rest or peace. Laugh as you will with the lips, your heart is filled with anguish and sadness. Not without reason are you so afraid to go to church and hear a sermon; for you dread lest what you hear should stimulate your conscience to give you a fresh thrust to disquiet you anew. Not without reason do you seek to distract yourself by going into society, by eating, drinking, gambling and all kinds of amusements, so as to divert your mind somewhat and find a little relief from the melancholy that oppresses you on account of your unhappy state. But all your efforts in that direction must remain fruitless; for the words of the all-seeing God cannot deceive; "there is no peace for the wicked."

Ah, how comes it then that since we all so long for peace and

contentment of mind we still have such little fear of the only disturber of our peace, that we daily commit sin? Are we not mad and foolish to have sinned so often and renounced God's friendship? What have we gained thereby? Has it ever done us the least good to have lost his grace and favor? No, we acknowledge that we have never had more troublous and melancholy days than those on which our conscience said to us: God no longer belongs to you. When the younger Tobias left home and went into a foreign land, how his mother sorrowed after him! How she wept and filled the whole house with her lamentations! O my son! my dear son! she exclaimed; why were we so thoughtless as to let you leave us? Accursed be that money for the sake of which you have gone from us! With you we have lost all! You are the staff of our old age, the comfort of our life, the hope of our family, our only joy in this world! We have more reason to cry out: Why have we been so mad and foolish as to drive God out of our heart? Accursed gain, that has caused us such loss! Accursed the brutish pleasure, that has robbed us of the Supreme Good! Would that we had lost the use of our limbs before going into that company in which we lost God from our conscience! Accursed sin, which has taken from us our God, and with him our rest, our consolation, our joy, our all! On the other hand, have we ever had reason to complain as long as we had God as our friend? No, truly; more joyful hours we have never spent than those in which our conscience said to us after we had repented of our sins: now God is again mine; I am again a friend and dear child of God. And so we will always remain. Away with all creatures and all the goods and pleasures of the world which could take the Supreme Good from us! We have possession of it again; we will hold it fast and not let it go for all eternity! Rather let all the pains and troubles of life come upon us, as long as we have peace of heart in the possession of God, than that we should lose our God and our peace of mind to gain all the goods of the world with sin disturbing our conscience.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE MANNER IN WHICH WE OUGHT TO PRAY.

"But he cried out much more: Son of David, have mercy on me."
Luke 18 : 39.

What a beautiful lesson this blind man teaches us by his example; for we learn from him that we must pray not only with humility, but also with constancy and perseverance, if we wish to be heard by God. Many Christians are wanting in this particular! I might perhaps make to many the same reproach that Christ made one of His Apostles: "Hitherto you have not asked anything" (John 16 : 24). And so it is in truth; many Christians do not pray, although they appear often in church and, as they imagine, offer up their prayers there. Be not surprised at what I am saying; I will show you that I have good reason for it.

I. Many Christians do not pray, but rather demand and desire.
II. Many Christians do not pray, but rather begin to pray.

There is a great difference between demanding and asking. To demand is to insist on having something that belongs to us by right; to ask is to beg for a favor that the person we are asking is not bound to give us. If I have a right to demand a thing, I need not pay many compliments nor seek for fine phrases in which to express my wishes; I can boldly urge my right, and insist on its being recognized. But if I am obliged to ask a favor, I must act far differently; I must bow and scrape, and make known my wants with the utmost humility, and persevere in my request until I get what I want.

What are we when engaged in prayer? All of us are beggars when we pray to God, no matter how rich or great we may be in the eyes of the world. And what sort of beggars are we? Ah, we are in far greater want than all the beggars in the world put together, and therefore, like them, we must knock and ask con-

stantly. And we do not need, like other beggars, to make ourselves appear poorer than we are, nor to pretend to be suffering from all sorts of diseases in order to move God to take pity on us. For indeed our misery is greater than we imagine, greater than we ourselves can say. There is not a crumb we eat, nor a drop we drink, nor a thread of clothing we put on, that we must not receive as an alms from the hands of God. But these wants are of the least consequence. How do matters stand with our souls? A secret pride, innate in all men; a self-love that shows itself in almost all our actions, and ruins even our good works; a vain sensuality that cannot bear the least discomfort or suffering; a constant, excessive care for temporal things, by which the heart and mind are turned away from the love of eternal goods and from our last end; an unceasing strife that the flesh wages against the spirit and against right reason, which often leads us into sin; these and countless other evil inclinations, desires, and wounds of the soul are hidden in us, and through want of attention we are hardly aware of their existence. And what a multitude of outward temptations, occasions, and dangers we have to withstand from other creatures, and from the suggestions and assaults of the devil, inclined as we are already to wickedness! Alas, at any moment we can lose an eternal heaven; at any moment we can prepare eternal torments for ourselves. To avoid this twofold evil, we are in want of the help and grace of God, without which we are incapable of forming even a good thought. Now the will of God is that we should with all humility pray to him for that help and grace.

But many who pray are wanting in inward humility of heart. "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee, standing prayed thus with himself: O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers." Do we not find people of that kind even among Christians, who come to the house of God to hear Mass, and know not even what they are to pray for, or why they should pray? If they are not under the pressure of some

temporal calamity, or otherwise not obliged to ask God for worldly prosperity, they are as strange with him as if they were not at all in need of his assistance and grace, although in reality they are in the midst of miseries and dangers as to their souls, and therefore have good reason to beg God humbly to help them. But they do not come here to beg for alms like mendicants. "To beg I am ashamed" (Luke 16 : 3), they say with the steward in the Gospel ; and their want of humility shows that they speak the truth, or that they imagine they need not beg. What wonder is it then that they receive nothing from God, says St. Augustine, speaking of the words of the psalm "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." "You are not heard, because you are rich ;" not, indeed, always rich in money and worldly goods, but in your own imagination and opinion ; for you do not know your own poverty, or at least you do not act as a poor man.

Consider what the publican did in the temple : "The publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven, but struck his breast, saying : O God, be merciful to me a sinner." And he got what he asked for : "This man went down into his house justified, because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18 : 13, 14). Consider how Paul acted during prayer ; "I bow my knee," he says himself, "to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephes. 3 : 14). See how Peter behaved when he raised Tabitha to life : "Peter, kneeling down, prayed" (Acts. 9: 40). James used to remain so long on his knees that they became quite hard : "He prayed so long on bended knees that the skin of them seemed to have become as hard as that of a camel." If these examples cannot move you to humility, then consider the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, and see in what a lowly posture he prayed in the garden : "Kneeling down he prayed" (Luke 22 : 41). But he did not think that enough : "He fell upon his face praying" (Matt. 26 : 39). And you, poor mortals, who are dust and ashes, and are as nothing before God, dare to appear in his sight with such

little respect? But this, my dear brethren, is not yet enough; for they who are not wanting in humility are sometimes at fault in another way; they do not pray, but only begin to pray; they are wanting in perseverance.

II. If we had not the clear and oft-repeated promises of God to hear our prayers, then we might perhaps have cause to be afraid of presenting our petitions to such a great Lord, and to doubt whether we should be allowed to have an audience with him, not to speak of his granting our prayers. We are astonished at the offer made by the vain Herod to the dancing girl, "Ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee, though it be the half of my kingdom; and he swore to her" (Mark 6 : 22, 23), to make her quite sure. We think Solomon fortunate in having such a magnificent offer made him by the Almighty God: "Ask what thou wilt that I should give thee" (3. Kings 3 : 5). Oh, we say, what a great favor that was! How fortunate for Solomon! But what have we to be amazed at? Is our fortune less? Has not God said just as much to me and you and all men? Has not Christ, the Son of God, made the same promise to us, and assured us of it by a twofold oath, as we read in the Gospel of St. John: "Amen, amen, I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you" (John 16 : 23).

How unlimited and generous this promise is! If you ask anything, he says, whatever it be; he makes no exception. Again, how forcibly, how sweetly he tries to impress this promise on us, so as to encourage us to confidence in prayer. He does not say, If you ask God, or the Lord; but, the Father. Can there be any sweeter name than that? Nay, to put away all fear from our minds, he does not say my Father, but simply "the Father," the common Father of all. And to our still greater consolation Christ assures us of that: "For the Father himself loveth you" (John 16 : 27); so that it is not even necessary for me to ask for you. He complains, as it were, that we are so bashful and diffident in making requests of him: "Hitherto you have not asked anything" (John 16 :

24). "Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full." "Knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened" (Matt. 7 : 7). With all this, then, I ask you again, Christians, can we have the least doubt that our prayers will be heard by the Almighty God, or can we complain that we are too miserable, too much exposed to temptations and dangers of sin, while we have such a powerful means of defence at hand that we can make use of at any moment? Yes, you think; these are all fine words; but what better are we for them? I have often prayed for many things, even for what concerns my salvation; for instance, to be freed from some vexatious temptations, to overcome some evil passion, to have a zealous love for God, to be patient in adversity, to be fully resigned to the divine will; I have prayed for the conversion of my husband, my wife, but all to no purpose. But what are you saying? Have you prayed for those things? and to God? and humbly and fervently, being in the state of grace? Yes, I have done the best I could. But that cannot be; you have not prayed; you have only begun to pray, and have acted like the beggar who went away at the first refusal through impatience.

One of the chief qualities of efficacious prayer is *constancy and perseverance.* God wishes to be asked, and to be compelled, and to be conquered by a sort of importunity. This is the meaning of the parable the tenor of which is: Is there one of you who goes to his friend in the middle of the night, and calls out to him through the door. My dear friend, lend me three loaves, for some one is come to visit me, and I have nothing to put before him; but the friend tells him to go away, as he is in bed and does not wish to get up. "Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise, and give him as many as he needeth. And I say to you," adds our Lord, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Luke 11 : 8, 9). It is not enough to knock once, twice, or three times; you must keep on knocking until you are heard,

and the door is opened to you. Perseverance is a great thing, and more friendly than the friend himself. For it deserves what is denied to the friend ; the latter receives not when he asks in a friendly manner; but his perseverance excites compassion. God often acts as if he were deaf to our prayers, partly because he does not wish to bestow his gifts too lightly, lest we should not esteem them properly, for generally we think little of what we easily acquire, and partly to induce us to pray more and for a longer time.

Moses was perfectly pleasing to God, yet he did not grant him a complete victory over the Amalekites until he was determined to persevere in prayer in spite of his great fatigue. Isaac was dear to God, and yet he had to wait for twenty years before having an heir from his sterile spouse, in spite of his prayers. The woman of Chanaan, crying out, said to Jesus : Have mercy on me, O Lord. And what did the otherwise so merciful Saviour do ? He did not deign to answer her a single word : she continued to implore and entreat him most pitifully : "Lord, help me " (Matt. 15 : 22, 23). But he takes not the least notice. Even the disciples, who were tired of the scene, began to add their entreaties to hers. But the Lord remains as immovable as before ; nay, he spurns her from him as if she were a dog: "It is not good to take the bread of the children, and to cast it to the dogs " (Matt. 15 : 26). He was pleased with the fervor and faith of the woman, and wished to display them still more. She came up to him and said: "Yea, Lord, for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters ;" as if she wished to say : Take pity on me ; give me at least a crumb ! Then at last the generous hand was opened. "O woman, " said Jesus to her with astonishment, "great is thy faith; be it done to thee as thou wilt, and her daughter was cured from that hour " (Matt. 15 : 28). If the woman had gone after the first or second rebuff, her daughter would not have been healed. Nearly in the same way did God act towards St. Monica. With burning tears that holy woman prayed for the conversion of her son Augustine. How long, and how often ? Every day for seventeen years. Now, if

she had grown tired and given up praying after the first ten or twelve years, her son would have become worse and worse, and there would have been no hope for him ; ah, and then, too, the Catholic Church would not have the great St. Augustine.

We complain and grow tired and give up if we do not receive a favorable answer the first or second time we knock. That is to say, that God must attend to us at once, although we perhaps often refuse to hear his voice when we are in the state of sin. No, that will not do. If we wish to pray properly, let us not merely begin, but continue to pray constantly and perseveringly, especially when we are asking for something that is conducive to our spiritual welfare, and that should be the chief, nay the only object of our prayers. Do not give way too soon, for you have the promise of Christ. Do not leave off until you have received. If you pray with that disposition, saying : I will not cease until I get what I ask : you will certainly be heard. If we are refused to-day what we ask for, we can still get it to-morrow. And if we are not heard this year, we shall surely be next year. And meanwhile we can be certain that our trouble in prayer will not be in vain. Ask with inward and outward humility, with constancy and perseverance ; Ask and you shall receive. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

WE MUST LOVE AND SERVE GOD, BECAUSE HE IS OUR LORD.

"*The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve.*"
Matt. 4 : 10.

Strange, indeed, that an express command had to be given to man under pain of eternal damnation to adore his Lord and God, and to serve him alone ? God, who is infinitely beautiful, who is infinitely perfect, and in himself worthy of all love ; in whom there is nothing that can be hated, nothing that must not be esteemed and loved, who showers benefits on us every moment of

our lives! What heart can be so ungrateful as not to honor and love him, whom we hope and desire to possess one day forever in heaven; in whom alone we can find all that can satisfy us. What man is there, who loves his own happiness, who should not adore this God, and love and serve him faithfully? And truly what is there more surprising than that there should be a necessity of a special command in this matter? But when I consider the way of the world, and how great the number of those who instead of loving and serving their God, only offend and insult him day by day, I am no longer surprised. In order, then, to force men to render him their due homage of love and service, God must have recourse to a strict command: "The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve," although what God is in himself should impel us to this love and service without any further law.

God is our Lord, and therefore we should serve him and love him with all our hearts.

If we had no other reason to impel us to do so, the mere fact of his being our Lord should suffice. And what kind of a lord is he? All the emperors, kings, and rulers of the world govern in a servile manner; they are masters and servants at the same time, because their power is united with want; they have received from God the power and right to rule over others and make laws for them; while all their pomp and magnificence they must get from the very persons whom they govern. They are in need of their subjects; they live on their labor; they must be fed and protected by them and maintained in the style suited to their dignity. If they lose their land and their people, there is an end to their splendor, and they become like other men. Napoleon I. & III. Don Pedro of Brazil: No man is really a master, as long as he is in need of a servant. The master and servant are alike in want; they are both mortals and both needy; for they are mutually in want of each other's help. Therefore no one of you is truly a mas-

ter, no one truly a servant. God, alone, is the true and real lord, that perfect master, who has no need of us. He does not want us, but we are in want of him, and therefore he is truly our Lord.

This lord can be called our Lord in a far more perfect sense than earthly potentates can receive that title from their subjects. These belong to their sovereigns in such a way that they are bound to obey the laws of the land, and to perform the services required from them ; but they do not receive their lives and being from their sovereigns. Princes and kings may say : these people are my subjects ; this kingdom, this country, belongs to me, it is for my use and service. But the subjects cannot say : the prince or king belongs to us, he is for our use and service. But God is truly our very own Lord ; we belong completely to him, and he, great as he is, belongs completely to us. Our souls and bodies and very lives belong to him by the title of creation, because he has created us out of nothing ; by the title of redemption, because he has bought us by his blood ; and by the title of preservation, for every moment he must, as it were, create us anew, nor can we make the least movement without his help and coöperation. Finally we belong to him by the title of that most just power by which he can do with us all he pleases without being in the least unjust to us. He can raise or lower me ; he can give riches or allow me to pine away in poverty ; he can give me health and strength, and again deprive me of it ; he can preserve my life, and take it from me just as he chooses ; he can reduce me to nothing, if such seems good to him, without being in the least accountable to any one ; and all that he can do with far more power and right than the owner can dispose of his horse, or sell it, or give it away, or permit it to rest in the stable, or drive it on the most difficult roads, or put a bullet through its head, without its having the smallest right to complain.

Although we belong thus completely to God our Lord, yet he, too, is ours, so that we can say with truth : God belongs to us completely. David rejoices at this : "Behold, I know thou art *my* God" (Ps. 45 : 10). He does not say, I know that thou art

God; but, I know that thou art my God. The Lord is ours to such an extent that, so to speak, he will not be a lord, unless for us. He has given us all that he has created outside of himself; he has given us all that he is in himself.

Nay, he does not look on it as even enough for his faithful servants that he has created heaven and earth for them. For it is his will that all he is and has should also be ours; he has made us like himself, in creating us to his own image; he has made himself like to us, when he took our nature on himself, and became a poor man for our sake; he gave himself completely to us, when he sacrificed his life on the gibbet of the cross for us; he made himself our food, since he left himself to us in the most blessed Sacrament of the Altar; every day he offers himself as a continual sacrifice for our sins to his Eternal Father; and he himself, with his whole divine essence, will be our reward in the heaven where we are to possess him for all eternity.

Christians, do you believe this truth? Do you thus acknowledge God as *your* Lord. But if you do where is the respect you owe him? Where the obedience, reverence, esteem, affection and love due to him? Should not this alone impel you to love God always with your whole hearts, to keep his law, to serve him alone? And yet you make the greatest difficulty of loving and serving our Lord! Is that not the case? We must love him according to the law he has laid down for us "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind" (Matt. 22 : 37). *With our whole heart*, inasmuch as we must truly love him above all things; esteem nothing, desire nothing, love nothing, but the Lord our God alone, and if we wish for anything else besides him, or esteem or love it, it must be on account of our Lord. *With our whole soul*, inasmuch as we do not allow ourselves to be moved by anything but God alone; if we rejoice, it should be on account of his endless glory and happiness; if we are sorrowful, it should be because we have despised and offended him, because so few really know and honor him, because so many dishonor his holy name. Our only fear should be to displease him by again

falling into sin ; if we hope for or desire anything, it should be perseverance in his grace and friendship, that we may love and praise him in eternity. *With our whole mind*, inasmuch as we should always think of our God and be concerned about nothing except pleasing him more and more. Finally, we should love him *with all our strength*, inasmuch as we should be ready to put forward every effort of soul and body when the honor of God requires it, and be prepared to sacrifice all we have, and all that the world esteems, and according to his good will and pleasure to accept all imaginable trials and difficulties, and bear them patiently till death for his sake. Alas, how far different is our conduct ! There is hardly anything in the world that is not preferred to God in our hearts, wishes, and desires, in our love and esteem. Bitter but true it is, God alone is vile in our eyes in comparison with other things. We should not dare to act in that way towards earthly sovereigns. If they give a command, or publish a law, or make known their will even by a word, or mere sign, oh, how obedient their servants are ! No difficulty frightens, no obstacle turns them away from their obedience ; their duty may be displeasing to them, but no matter what sacrifices it exacts, they are ready to make them. The king has commanded, or forbidden ; we must not go against his will. It is God alone who is thought of least of all by us ; whose commands and prohibitions are ruthlessly trodden under foot when it does not suit our convenience to observe them.

Moses and Aaron came to king Pharao and made known to him the command of God : "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel : Let my people go that they may sacrifice to me in the desert" (Exod. 5 : 2). What ? said the proud king by way of answer: "Who is the Lord that I should hear his voice, and let Israel go ? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go" (Exod. 5 : 1). So Pharao would not hear anything about the God of Israel. But he would have shown far greater pride and obstinacy, if he had said : I know the Lord but I will not hear his voice, nor obey his command. ? Where the shameless pride of Pharao failed to reach, thereto have we come, when we consent to grievous sin.

We know well that God; yet what answer do we often make him by our actions? I will not hear him, nor do as he orders me, nor obey him.

Can anything more terrible or presumptuous be imagined than for a Christian, who knows by the light of the true faith what a great Lord God is, to act in that manner? Richard, king of England, lost his way once when out hunting in the forest, and his servants being unable to find any trace of him, he was forced to beg hospitality for the night from a charcoal-burner, who received him indeed into his hut, but with so little courtesy, that at the very door he gave the king a box on the ear. Richard kept quiet and showed no indignation at the insult; but when he got safely home again, he put on his most costly apparel, seated himself, adorned with crown and sceptre, on his throne, and thus, surrounded by his ministers and vassals, caused his discourteous host to be brought before him, and said to him: "Do you know me now?" So terrible was the effect of these words on the poor man, that he sank dead on the ground with fear. Christians, that man acted in a most unbecoming manner towards his sovereign; but he did not know his dignity, and in so far he was excusable. But we know our great God and Lord, and yet we act far more rudely towards him than the charcoal-burner acted towards the king; nor are we frightened at the thought of the number of times we have insulted him by our sins.

Dear Christians, let us, after doing sincere penance for our past sins, write deep in our hearts the words which Moses addressed to the Israelites: "Therefore love the Lord thy God, and observe his precepts and ceremonies, his judgments and commandments at all times" (Deut. 11 : 1). If we will not love God because he is a God so worthy of our love; if we will not serve him because he is such a great Lord, let us at least love and serve him constantly because he is our God and our Lord, to whom we completely belong, who belongs completely to us. Let us love our Lord not merely with the lips during the time of prayer; but let us show this love in every deed and in all our

works, by faithfully doing his holy will. Let us love our Lord with our whole hearts above all created things. As our Lord he wishes to be loved and served by us; as our Lord he deserves that we should love and serve him. Woe to the man who loves anything with God, which he does not love on account of God.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE NUMBER OF THOSE WHO REALLY LOVE GOD IS SMALL.

"He was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as snow." Matt. 17 : 2.

These three disciples had already been a considerable time with Jesus; they had seen his most holy and perfect life, his many miracles, and yet they never had such pleasure in his presence, such a fervent desire to be with him, as they felt on Mount Thabor, when he was transfigured before them. They lost their senses almost with joy. Oh, cried out Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here;" let us never leave this place; "if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." They imagined they were already amidst the joys of heaven. But why? What did they see there? "He was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as snow." This was a mere figure of the future beauty and glory of the humanity of Christ in heaven. My dear brethren, we are created for no other end than to know the great God, to love him with our whole hearts.

There are few men who love Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with a sincere love; therefore there are few who are loved by Jesus Christ with a special love.

To love a person is nothing else than to wish well to him, to be sincerely glad of his fortune, to be troubled at his misfortunes, to be pleased when he is present, and in every way possible to seek

to serve him. When a love like this is returned, that is, when he whom I love loves me also, then there is friendship. Now, as there are many kinds of friendship in the world, so there are many kinds of love. Some love in outward appearance, through mere hypocrisy, and with the lips alone, while their hearts have nothing to do with it ; this is not love, but flattery and falsehood, and such friends are more to be dreaded than open and declared enemies, because one cannot be on his guard against them. Some love and really mean it in their hearts, and have a true affection for the person, but only so long as they receive benefits from him ; this is not an honest love ; for even the most savage barbarians and heathens can be softened by presents and benefits ; in this way, not the person, but his benefits are the object of the love. Others love although they have not received nor expect to receive any benefits from their friend ; but they do not show this love in act when there is an opportunity of doing him a service. This is not true friendship ; for he who loves sincerely, willingly shares with his friend, and would even take the bit out of his own mouth to give it to him. Others love and show their love in act; but they do not do so constantly and with their whole hearts ; they are shifting and changeable ; to-day they love one person, to-morrow another. That is a love that has no foundation. Others love the one person with their whole hearts, but only so long as he is prosperous ; in the time of need they fall away, and leave him, and are ashamed to be looked on as his friends ; they have no desire to share in his misfortunes. That is a weak friendship, and the one to which the old proverb refers : "a friend in need is a friend indeed." A sincere love does not allow itself to be interfered with by suffering, misfortune, or sorrow ; it sweetens all that is bitter, nor is there any hardship that it will not readily endure for the sake of the loved one. Finally, there are others who love constantly, with their whole hearts, even when their friend is in the greatest need ; they are ready to share with him all they have, and to bear anything for him, even when they have no hopes of gaining any reward thereby ; and that they do out of

sheer affection and tenderness. This alone is true, honest love and friendship.

Such love for God is a rare thing in the world. There are lovers enough in the world ; but how do they love ? And they love with great fervor and earnestness ; but what ? Would to God that their affections were directed to God alone, who is alone worthy of all our love.

Proud Christians! to what do your love and affections, your hearts and desires tend ? To Jesus the Son of God ? No indeed ; he is too vile in your eyes ; he acts in too humble a manner for your taste ! There he lies in the manger, between the ox and the ass, unknown and despised by the world, while his companions are poor shepherds. Your thoughts and ideas tend much higher than that ! So that you do not love Jesus, and you renounce his friendship and company ; for he cannot bear the proud, while he shows favor to the humble : "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble " (James 4 : 6). You misers, where does your love tend to ? To Jesus ? Far from it! Money and property, which you try to scrape together by all possible means, you will not find with him. A handful of straw on a hard block of wood is his couch ; swaddling-clothes are his wardrobe, the breath of the animals his fire and hearth, a poor virgin his mother, a poor carpenter his foster-father.

But, you will say: there are very many Christians who love god; for what else are we to conclude when we see zealous, pious Christians thronging the confessionals, and before the altars in the churches, uttering those loving words: O God, I love thee; I love thee with all my strength, with my whole heart and soul, more than myself, more than everything in heaven and on earth ? If there were neither heaven nor hell, I should still love thee, because thou art my God and my Saviour. Such are their sighs and their prayers. All that would indeed be very fine; if true love consisted in such things I should retract what I have said, and assert that the greater number of Catholics love God. But attend to their actions and mode of life, and you will see that generally speaking their love is but a

lip service, a simulated affection, a friendship consisting in mere words, but not a love in reality. Their lives do not harmonize with their words; and the same persons who praise and bless God with their lips will soon afterwards again insult and revile him by their repeated sins ; they who in the church sing and pray like Angels before the altars, when they go home, curse and swear like demons if the least thing crosses them. Is that the way to love? No, certainly, deeds are the proof of love. What sort of a love is that which consists in praising one with the lips and saying, I love you, while you actually beat him with your fists, trample him under your feet, and raise your stick at him? That is to give him a friendly kiss and at the same time hand him over to his enemies, as the traitor Judas did with our Lord. That is to greet and embrace him with one hand, while with the other you pierce his heart, as Joab did to Amasa. That is the way in which many of us love God in word only, but not in deed ; and then we flatter ourselves that we are pious and devout. But love does not consist in that : "My little children,"says St. John,"let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (I. John 3 : 18). How is that to be done ? Hear what Christ himself says, "If any one love me, he will keep my word" (John 14 : 23). The love of God is in the will, and it is a real conformity of our human with the divine will ; so that we will what God has commanded, and avoid what he has forbidden.

When we love a person, we like to speak of him, and to hear others speak of him ; our greatest pleasure is to hold a conversation with him, while the time we spend in his presence never seems too long, never wearisome. So does our Saviour love us, as we should by rights love him. "My delight," he says, "is to be with the children of men" (Prov. 8 : 31). But, what pleasure and joy men find in God, and in his company is shown clearly enough by the weariness they feel when God is spoken of ! I allude to the little desire they have to hear sermons and Christian instructions. The sermons are too long, they should be short. Oh, what a cold love of God that shows !

When we love a person, we are rejoiced at his prosperity, and deeply afflicted when things go wrong with him. We see, and hear, and know that the God whom we say we love, is grossly insulted and offended and mocked every day, and every hour of every day, by great and small, young and old, who sin against him ; where is our sympathy, our sorrow and affliction ? The little concern that we feel at the terrible offences offered to God, the coldness and indifference with which we look on while countless sins are committed every day, without moving a step to prevent them, are certainly an evident proof that we have in our hearts but a very small spark of the true love of God.

When we love a person, we rejoice to be able to suffer something for him ; for, nothing is difficult to one who loves ; nothing is too bitter, nothing too hard, provided he can thereby please his beloved one. Thus we read that Jacob thought nothing of the seven years during which he had to work for his beloved Rachel ; they seemed but a few days because of his love (Gen. 29 : 20). What is our love like in this respect, my dear brethren? As long as we have nothing to suffer, as long as things go according to our wishes, and we are in good health and spirits, receiving consolations from God ; when Jesus comes to us in the appearance of a bridegroom,and invites us into the garden, into the wine-cellar, as we read in the Canticle, then we are zealous and active in the service of God ; then we cry out : "My heart is ready, O God ; my heart is ready" (Ps. 107 : 2). Then we exclaim : God be praised ! I am still prospering ! Blessed be God ! I am still in good health ; glory be to God ! this undertaking has succeeded with me. But if our Lord comes like a poor child ; if he shows himself to us torn by the scourges, or nailed to the cross ; if he asks us : "Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink ?" (Matt. 22 : 22); if we hear him calling out to us from afar, saying : "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16 : 24), how unpleasant those words are in our ears !

True love is generous, and has nothing too precious to give the

loved one. But how miserly we are towards God! If we do and avoid that to which we are bound under pain of eternal damnation, we seem to have done wonders. Is this or that a mortal sin? we ask sometimes. Oh, if not, then we can do it. But it is a venial sin,—oh, that is nothing! Who can avoid small sins? If I did this or that, if I put a stop to that abuse or that vanity, I know I should please God; but he is not so dear to me as all that. I love Jesus my Saviour; but my friendship for him does not go to such lengths; I cannot overcome myself in that particular. I will say nothing of the love of our neighbor, of generosity to the poor, of benefiting those who hate and persecute us,—all duties that we would certainly perform if we loved God sincerely, for even the servants of one whom we love are of interest to us, nay, we feed our friend's dog and do not suffer it to go away hungry. And I must also pass over the carelessness we show in furthering the divine honor, although many occasions present themselves of furthering it. Nay, would to God that we were not sometimes ashamed of being pious and devout.

You see now, my dear brethren, that, if we go through all classes of men, we shall find very few who love God sincerely. And why is that? Is God so worthless that he is not deserving of love? And yet, what is there in him that does not deserve the greatest love? If we love what is beautiful, why not love God, who is infinite beauty? If we love what is good, why not God, the supreme Good? if we love him who is our benefactor, why not God, from whom we have everything? How is it that our hearts are so hard towards God? Love for us poor worms of the earth has brought him down from heaven, and laid him on a handful of straw, while our love for God cannot bring us from earth to heaven? The world, the flesh, the devil have done nothing like that for the love of us; they can only offer us miserable things, which will hurl us into the depths of hell; and yet they find lovers enough all the world over, though there is no command to love them. God has left nothing undone to win our love, has promised the kingdom of heaven to those who love him,

and threatened the fire of hell to those who do not love him. And yet he can find but few lovers!

How unjust and ungrateful we are in being so hard-hearted! After having created us out of nothing, saved us from hell by his death, made us his children and heirs to the kingdom of heaven; after having showered countless benefits on us, it was still necessary for him to command us to love him, for it would have been intolerable if we had not freedom to do so. Why have we not loved God sooner? And how have we ever dared to hate and provoke him to anger? Shall we not then, at once begin to love God sincerely? Late have we loved thee, O beauty ever ancient, ever new. Little have we loved thee, because we have little known thee, but henceforth we will love thee with our whole heart, with our whole soul and with our whole mind, and nothing in heaven, or on earth shall ever separate us from the love of God. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

WE MUST FEAR AND LOVE GOD, BECAUSE HE IS ALMIGHTY.

"*When he had cast out the devil, the dumb spoke; and the multitude were in admiration at it.*" *Luke* 11 : 14.

A single word of our Lord's, a sign, was sufficient to cast out the devil and to make the dumb speak, the blind see, the lame walk, and to restore the sick to health, and the dead to life. It was that which excited the admiration of the bystanders. They looked on Christ as a mere man like themselves; if they had known him to be true God, they would not have been so astonished at his miracles, for with God a word or command is enough to effect whatever he wishes. Why? Because he is an almighty Lord, to whom nothing is impossible. There you have another reason for giving to God,—who is your Lord by countless titles, and is most worthy of your love, the homage of your fear, or of your love? Of both, as I believe; you must love him and fear him at the same

time, according as we are disposed towards him, as I shall now show.

Our Lord and God is an almighty Lord; therefore the just should love him all the more, while sinners should fear and tremble before him.

He alone can be called almighty who can cause something to exist where there was nothing before, and can do so at once, so that, without trouble on his part or help from others, he can create what he pleases; his power and will must be such that no other power can resist them, and that without him no other power can do the least thing. There you have a short description of the unlimited and perfect power of God.

1. God can make a thing without any pre-existing material, a power that seems impossible and is incomprehensible to any created intelligence. One of the first maxims of philosophy is, out of nothing nothing can be made. If the shoemaker has to make a pair of shoes, the tailor a coat, they must necessarily have materials for their work, as well as instruments and tools wherewith to work, and time and place in which to work, otherwise they can do nothing. Let all the mighty ones of the world gather together, with all the Angels in heaven; let them put forward all their sharpness of intellect, and then, if they can bring into being a single grain of sand, a single blade of grass; but they will never be able to do that. If the sun were as a grain of sand, and God had afterwards made it many thousand times larger than the earth, would not that be a great miracle? And yet it is a still greater wonder to make something out of nothing, to create the smallest grain of sand, than to make the sun out of that grain, because there is some resemblance, although a very small one, between the sun and the grain of sand; for the sun is something, and the grain of sand is something; but between nothing and the grain of sand there is absolutely no resemblance

whatever. "From nothing nothing can be made." God alone has the power to make out of nothing in a moment all he pleases. God has made this earth, which is twenty-five thousand miles in circumference, out of nothing, and he has placed it in the air unsupported by ropes or pillars, with all its weight of oceans, mountains, towns, and towers; nor can it fall; and it has its fixed place, which it will not leave. The mighty vault of the heavens is more than a hundred and sixty millions of miles distant from the earth, so that its whole circumference is more than nine hundred and sixty millions of miles. Yet this stupendous work has no pillars to rest on, no ropes to hang by, no hinges on which to turn; but it does not fall down, and always goes along on the road pointed out for it by its Creator. And this great weight moves so rapidly, that each point of it passes over more than forty million of miles in an hour, yet it never gets out of repair, nor requires to be mended or changed.

2. God can do that at once, in a single moment. Men must remove many obstacles out of their way before undertaking any work; so that, according to the nature of their task, they require more or less time in which to perform it. How much time it requires to build a magnificent palace according to the rules of art! Pliny writes of the temple of the goddess Diana at Ephesus that it was a wonder of magnificence. But how much time did it take to build it? For two hundred and twenty years was the whole of Asia employed on it. The whole universe, the heavens and the earth, were made out of nothing by the Lord whose name is Almighty, nor did he require more time than a single moment in which to do it.

3. Nor did it cost him more labor or trouble than a single word, a breath of his mouth, an act of his will; with the almighty God alone willing and being able, saying and doing, commanding and fulfilling, are all one and the same. God said: be light made, and light was made, . . . let there be a firmament made

amidst the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And it was so. Let the waters that are under the heaven be gathered together into one place; and let the dry land appear. And it was so done. Let the earth bring forth the green herb; . . . let there be lights made in the firmament; . . . let the waters bring forth the creeping creature; . . . let the earth bring forth the living creature; and so it was done. "He spoke, and they were made." A word was enough for him to produce any effect he pleased. And just as he has created the world by a word, he could also, if it were his will, with one word create new worlds every moment. But what do I say of a new world? Picture to yourselves a million of worlds, all greater than and of different form to this. God can make infinitely more of them. And as he has made all things by a word, and can still make other things in the same way, so also he can destroy what he has made, and reduce all to nothing.

4. The fourth proof of a great power is to produce great effects with small and weak means, and to have no need of other help. God created the whole universe, heaven and earth, in a moment. Ask the prophet Isaias what trouble it cost him, or how many Angels he employed in that work, and you will hear that he accomplished it without help of any kind, by the mere breath of his mouth: "I am the Lord that make all things, that alone stretch out the heavens, that establish the earth, and there is none with me" (Is. 44 : 24).

5. The fifth proof of omnipotence is that there is no power or might that can withstand the will of God. "O Lord, Lord, almighty king," exclaims Mardochæus, "for all things are in thy power, and there is none that can resist thy will. Thou art Lord of all, and there is none that can resist thy majesty" (Esther 13 : 9, 11). If God wishes to humble the obstinate and bring them to obedience, all creatures, even those without life or reason, are at his disposal, ready to execute his commands. King Pharao

dared to dispute his authority: "Who is the Lord that I should hear his voice? I know not the Lord" (Exod. 5 : 2). But God brought him to reason by the vilest things, frogs, flies, and gnats, and showed him that he must let the people of Israel go into the desert.

6. There is nothing in the world so strong and mighty that it can do the least thing without his help. "Without him was made nothing that was made" (John 1 : 3). Without his coöperation nothing is, nor can act. I cannot move foot, or hand, or finger, unless God gives me the movement. Not a drop of water falls from the clouds, not a leaf from the trees, not a hair from my head, unless God the first Mover, so disposes things. If calamities and misfortunes happen, it is to no purpose that we throw the blame on creatures. If affairs succeed with us, to no purpose and unjustly do we ascribe our success to our own industry, or to the help we have received from others; the almighty God is the cause of it all; health and prosperity, fortune and happiness, the fruitfulness of the earth, victory in war, riches, all come from the hand of the almighty Lord.

What salutary thoughts should this truth inspire us with to our instruction and the profit of our souls? The two following, for two sorts of men, the just and the wicked: If we are in the state of sanctifying grace, if we love our God and keep his commandments, what good things may we not hope for from him! If we do not love him, if we are in the state of sin, have we not just reason to fear? Marius, the favorite of the emperor Tiberius, once showed his power by inviting a man of lowly condition to his table; but during the feast he caused the man's house to be razed to the ground. The poor man, when he came home, could hardly realize what had become of his house. The next day Marius again invited him, and during the repast caused a new and better house to be built for him on the same ground. It is easy to imagine his astonishment on returning in the evening; he could hardly believe his eyes, and looked on the new house as the

effect of a dream. Marius then sent for him : see, said he, I am able to throw down your house and to rebuild it ; should you not, then, be careful to keep me as your friend, since I can do you so much harm and so much good in one day ? Woe to you if you do anything against me ; but well will it be for you if you always keep my friendship. O Christians, how much more should we not fear to have the Lord our God as our enemy ! How much greater care and diligence should we not employ to keep as our friend him who at every moment of our lives can inflict an infinite harm on us, or give us an infinite good ! In the first place, God is an almighty Lord ; what good, then, may we not expect from him, if we are in his grace, if we are his friends, his dear children, if we endeavor to do his will in all things, and with child-like confidence fly to him for refuge ? If without any fault of ours we are in the danger or the occasion of losing our souls ; if the evil one with his suggestions, or men with their flatteries, or our own flesh with its unruly desires, attack and try to lead us into sin, what have we to fear ? The almighty God is present with us, and to him our weakness, no matter how great it is, is well known ; he can protect us in temptations and dangers : he has promised us his help, and if we only make up our minds to work with it, he will preserve us from sin. If I am in temporal or bodily affliction, what comfort have I not in my trouble ? I have an almighty Lord present with me, from whom, as I know for certain, the cross, the poverty, or the persecution comes ; he can take it from me in a moment, if he wishes, and if he does not do so, I am certain that he has ordained the tribulation for my greater good, and that he will reward me for it eternally in heaven. If I desire to fulfil the duties of my state well and satisfactorily, and to attain true perfection and holiness, I have an almighty Lord ready to help me. No stone so hard, no block so unshapely, that he cannot make out of it children of Abraham. He converted the publican into an apostle, the murderer into a confessor of the faith, the greatest sinners into the greatest Saints.

On the other hand, are we in the state of sin ? Have we this

God as our enemy? Then we have not to do with a stock, or a stone, or a lifeless statue, but with an almighty God; and what have we not to fear if we fall into disgrace with him? Pains and sickness, shame and disgrace, poverty and hunger, fire and water, thunder and lightning, all the trials and tribulations of the world are in his hand, and at any moment he can visit us with them and utterly destroy us. But that is the least I have to fear. For our enemy is the almighty God, who "can destroy both soul and body into hell" (Matt. 10 : 28). O presumptuous mortals that we are, what have we done? We have not hesitated to rise up against God, and to offend him by many mortal sins! We who in comparison with God are less than the leaf that is blown about by the wind, than a dry straw, we have presumptuously rebelled against the almighty God! against that God who by his omnipotence keeps us every moment from falling back into our original nothingness! against that God without whose help we cannot move a muscle, nor speak a word, nor stir a limb! It is an abomination before men, when one who is wretchedly poor is at the same time proud. That thought should soften our hearts. Let us surrender ourselves to God and acknowledge with sorrow and regret, through love of him that we have sinned against the Almighty God and Lord! We promise never again, O God, shall that be the case for all eternity! Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE NECESSITY OF THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE JUST.

"*A great multitude followed him.*" *John* 6 : 2.

Wherever our Lord went during the three years of his public ministry, he was always followed by a great crowd of people; but not all of them were animated by the same motive. Some went through curiosity to see the miracles he wrought; others were intent on watching all he did and marking what he said; others

were carried to him to be healed of the bodily diseases from which they were suffering; and others went to listen to his preaching and instructions. The very best motive amongst them all was that of those who followed him to hear the word of God, to feed their souls with it, to be instructed in good, and to learn the right way to heaven. Among the great crowd there must have been many who followed our Lord for the reason of being desirous to hear him. Do we come to our Lord in the church for the same reason? Are we all eager to hear the word of God in sermons? You know that it is a bad and dangerous sign for a Christian seldom or never to hear a sermon; for, generally speaking, those who are in a bad or dangerous state of soul are enemies of the word of God. Hence I say

To hear the word of God in sermons often and constantly is necessary even for those who are innocent and just, to work out their salvation.

I do not speak of an absolute necessity, as if we could not possibly save our souls without it. Baptism is necessary for all men; faith in the one true God is necessary for all who have attained the use of reason; supernatural sorrow is necessary for those who have committed mortal sin. I do not say that sermons are necessary in that sense. What I mean is that, considering our innate ignorance in divine things, the many temptations, allurements, and evil inclinations that assail us, our own natural weakness and frailty, which makes it impossible for us to withstand those temptations for a long time, and moreover our propensity to many kinds of vice and our inconstancy in good, it is very difficult, nay, hardly possible for a man to work out his salvation as he ought, unless he is frequently enlightened, instructed, moved, and comforted by hearing the word of God.

What a desirable state is that of baptismal innocence, the state of justice, in which the soul, being adorned with sanctifying grace, keeps constantly in the friendship of God! But without the

guidance and influence of the word of God, how long can that state last? Faith teaches us that, in order to do any good work deserving of heaven, we stand in absolute need of the forestalling and helping grace of God, which consists in the enlightenment of the understanding and the movement of the will. Without this enlightenment and movement, no one can hope that he will remain long in the state of innocence in the midst of so many snares, temptations, and dangers. Now, in the present arrangement of his providence, God has determined to give his graces in the ordinary course, at a convenient time, and by the ways and means which render us best disposed to receive those graces; among which means the chief is the hearing of the word of God. "*Faith cometh by hearing*," says St. Paul, so that all supernatural, meritorious works, since they must spring from faith, must have their origin first in what is heard or understood by signs. "And hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10 : 17), that is, you must receive the doctrine by the word of the Lord. "How shall they believe him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10 : 14.) That is, how can men hear the word of Christ if there be no one to announce and explain it to them? And I add: What can a preacher do for them if they do not come to church to hear him?

It is almost as bad as tempting God to think of persevering in good without ever hearing the word of God in sermons. St. Paul, after he had received that bright ray of light from heaven, and was moved to conversion by the powerful voice of Jesus Christ himself, was still obliged to go to Ananias, a man like himself, to be taught and instructed by him. Cornelius, the centurion, is spoken of in terms of the highest praise as a man who was always inclined to virtue, and who was given to prayer and works of devotion with his whole family, while he was very generous to the poor. Yet an Angel was sent from heaven to direct him to Peter, from whom he had to learn how he was to live in future. But why send for Peter? Could not the Angel have instructed Cornelius? An Angel can give more light to the human understand-

ing in a moment than the most learned men in a long time; why, then, did not the Angel teach Cornelius what he had to do? No, a man had to do that. Christ appeared to St. Paul; why did he not instruct him? No, again that instruction had to come from another man. For God has so ordained that men should be instructed by men and learn his will from them.

If a piece of ground, no matter how fertile, is now sown, what will it produce, unless weeds, thistles, and thorns? No matter how strong and healthy a man may be, if he takes no nourishment for six, or eight days, what will become of him? If the traveler, in spite of his strength, has to go along a slippery and dangerous road in the dark night, without any light to guide his steps, what can he expect but to stumble and fall, and perhaps break an arm or a leg? What will be the consequence, then, when one rarely goes to a sermon? What fruit can the soul produce, no matter how good and innocent it is, if the seed of the divine word is seldom or never planted in it? Nothing can grow in it but weeds, thorns, and thistles, faults and imperfections of all kinds, sins and vices. The word of God is the food of the soul. "It is written: not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4 : 4). As the body is when it has been many days without food, so is the soul that is not fed often with the word of God; the body must necessarily grow weak, sicken, and die when deprived of its proper food; the soul must in the ordinary course of things become tepid in the divine service, and lose its spiritual life, if it is kept long without the word of God. The word of God is a light on the dark road that leads to heaven. Without this light, how could a poor, ignorant mortal travel along the dangerous and mostly unknown road that leads to eternity, on which many have lamentably come to grief? How could he hope to escape the dangers, occasions, and temptations to sin that surround him on all sides? Although a man is of good will to persevere in the way of salvation and in the friendship of God, and to gain heaven, yet, by neglecting the word of God, or through culpable igno-

rance, he can easily go astray, or fall through weakness, frailty, sloth, or tepidity.

How many Christians have to admit that they would often have fallen in that violent temptation, in that dangerous company into which they came against their will, and would have committed many sins, were it not for the sermons they had heard, and the good resolutions that the word of God inspired them with! For they learned to know their last end for which God created them, and why they are in the world, which is only to love God with all their hearts and serve him zealously, keep his commandments, and thus save their souls. They knew what they had to do and avoid in order to attain this end. And thus, having often heard the gravity and deformity of sin explained, they conceived a hatred, horror, and fear of all mortal sin, and made the firm resolution rather to lose everything in the world, and to suffer all conceivable torments and a thousand deaths, than consent to one grievous sin.

Unhappy sinners, how many of you might have kept your souls free from the filth of sin, if from your youth you had been accustomed to hear the word of God and to receive it with joy! But now your souls are like uncultivated ground, and are full of the weeds of sin and vice, because you have had little or none of the seed of God's word planted in them, and thus, through your own fault, they are become like barren, dried up ground, weakened and sickened by long-continued hunger and thirst, while divine love has died within you, as it was so long deprived of the nourishment of the word of God; thus it is that you have fallen so shamefully, as you had not the light of God's word to guide your steps. Be converted and begin now at least to make use of this powerful means to hear sermons, for that will induce you to do true penance and amend your lives. Hence parents will see the importance of their making a firm resolution, if they fear God, to accustom their children from their tenderest years to hearing Christian instructions and sermons. For, although the children will not understand all they hear, yet they will learn many truths which will be useful

to their souls their whole lives long. They will learn to hate sin and love virtue, to have a true love of God, to despise earthly and transitory things, to value heavenly goods, to work out their salvation carefully. "Come, children," parents should say in the words of the Holy Ghost, "hearken to me ; I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Ps. 33 : 12). Come with me, and I will bring you where you will learn to fear God, to serve him, to love him above all things with your whole hearts, so that we may one day all rejoice together in heaven.

Such, too, should be the determination of every one here, no matter how just and pious, learned and experienced, prudent and intelligent he may be otherwise. Morally speaking, the spiritual food of the word of God is necessary for all Christians to enable them to work out their salvation properly. And let no one put forward the pretext suggested by worldly wisdom, that is folly in the sight of God ; I do not want any one to preach to me ; I know well enough what to do and avoid in order to gain heaven; I have already heard sermons enough, so that there can be nothing new in them for me now. What? Do you know all that can be said of the Gospel truths ? That is indeed a proud and presumptuous thing for you to say ! Preachers have to study for many years what they say in the pulpit for their own good and that of others ; they must diligently collect matter out of the Holy Scriptures, out of the commentaries of the Scriptures, the holy Fathers and other spiritual writers ; they must pray fervently to God to suggest to them the truths he wishes them to explain to their hearers, and how these truths are to be explained so as to be useful ; and when they have thus spent ten, twenty, or thirty years, not one of them would be so proud and presumptuous as to maintain that he knows all that can be said about moral theology and the Gospel truths. And yet one who is occupied all the week with temporal cares, and has but one hour during that time to devote to the study of divine things, of which he learns simply what he can hear and bring away with him, pretends to know all about them ! Supposing even (although I can-

not believe it) that you have heard all that can be said of the truths of faith, is your memory so wonderfully good that you do not require to be reminded of them now and then? Where is the man in the whole world who does not forget much that he has either heard, or read, or otherwise learned? Consider this one fact: the preacher has his matter deeply impressed on his memory; he reflects on it often; he makes notes of the sermon, and studies how he is to treat his subject so as to make the deepest impression on the minds of his hearers; he has to read many books that bear on the subject, and then he puts everything down in order on a paper, word for word; after that he must still read it perhaps ten times from beginning to end, so as to commit it to memory, and finally he repeats it almost word for word in the pulpit. Who would not think that he could not possibly forget it? And yet I can with truth say of myself that if I were asked how I treated this or that subject a month ago, I could not tell. And yet one who has heard the subject treated of once or twice many years ago can boast of having such a good memory that he does not require to be reminded of it?

Be that as it may to be instructed in good, to learn the divine truths and to be frequently reminded of them, is, you must know, the least fruit to be derived from the frequent hearing of the word of God; the chief end of the preacher is to move the wills of his hearers, that they may use what they hear, and learn and regulate their lives according to it. We may know a great many good things; the difficulty lies in doing them. King David was certainly enlightened in heavenly things; he knew well what terrible sins are adultery and murder, and what a miserable thing it is to be in the state of mortal sin, an enemy of God, a slave of the devil, a child of reprobation, a victim for hell; and yet for a long time he was not moved to repent and reconcile himself with God, whom he so ardently loved before, until the prophet Nathan showed him in a simile the abomination he was guilty of. Then at last he came to himself, as if he had awakened out of a deep sleep, and he repented of and detested his sin, sighing forth from the depths

of his heart: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2. Kings 12: 13).

I conclude with the words of the Holy Ghost: "Come, children, hearken to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Come, children of God, come sinners, too, unhappy children of reprobation as you still are, if you wish to become again children of God; I will teach you true penance, the fear of God, the love of God; neither I, however, nor any other preacher in the world can do that by his own strength, but the Holy Ghost will speak by preachers as his instruments and mouth-pieces, and will enlighten your mind, and move your hearts so that you will do good. Come to High Mass and sermons with hearts desirous of hearing the word of God; that most important of all affairs, our eternal salvation, our last end, for which alone we are in this world, all depend on it.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE KEEPING OF THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

"If any man keep my word, he shall not see death forever."
John 8: 51.

No one wishes to go to hell; all desire heaven; but it seems to many, there is a very difficult condition attached to the fulfilment of that desire: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19: 17). Baptism is not enough, nor to be a member of the one true Church; nor is it enough to have faith and hope, nor is it enough to love God with the lips alone. "If any man keep my word," that is, my law, he shall not see death forever but possess eternal life. No Christian doubts that it is absolutely necessary to keep the commandments in order to gain heaven; but there are many who ask the question: Why is it that God who truly wills all men to be saved, has placed so many and such difficult commands upon us, which most people in the world

violate, and thus are shut out from eternal happiness and condemned to hell? And again: Why has the same God forbidden us the very things to which we are naturally inclined, so that we cannot avoid them without great trouble and self-denial? Would it not have been better either to have given us no law at all, or else to have taken those inclinations away from us?

I. *All that God has commanded or forbidden is necessary for even the temporal welfare of each one and of the whole community.*

II. *But since most of his prohibitions run counter to our natural inclinations, they are necessary also for our spiritual welfare in time as well as in eternity.*

I. Reason tells us that the commandments are necessary for the temporal prosperity of the world. You say that it is too hard to keep all the commandments, and to keep them exactly and constantly. But which commandment are you speaking of? Show me a single one of them all which is not acknowledged by all who use their reason properly to be necessary for the general welfare of the world.

Do you think it well that each one should be allowed to seek out a god according to his own fancy, an ox, for instance, a calf, or a brazen image? That each one should be allowed to adore the devil, to bend the knee to him, and ask his advice and help? No, certainly not; that must not be. God is our true God, and there is no other beside him. Very well, then, let the first commandment be: "*I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have strange gods before me; thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing,*" to adore it. But now that he is to be recognized as the true God everywhere, do you think it would be right for his name to be blasphemed by the wicked, and to be uttered without reverence at the least provocation? No. Very well, then, let the second commandment be: "*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.*" Do you not think it would be right to have a day and a place set apart for his service? Certainly, there can be no doubt

of it; Good! then we shall put this, too, amongst the other laws: "*Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.*" What do you think is owing to those from whom, after God, one receives his life, his daily bread, his clothing, and all the necessaries of life for years and years, and all bestowed with the greatest love and kindness? The answer to that is easy, for every sense of honor and decency requires that we should love them sincerely, and show them all honor and respect. Then let the fourth commandment be: "*Honor thy father and thy mother.*" But now, supposing that men were allowed to act as they pleased towards their fellows, to hate them, persecute them, curse them, revile and calumniate them, and beat, wound, and murder them; if men were allowed to take away each other's property; if the sexes could live without any more restraint than dumb animals, do you think that it would be conducive to the general good? Certainly not. Therefore we shall put amongst our written laws the following: "*Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor?*" But since wilful thoughts and desires are the road to excesses that must not be permitted, would it be right to allow every one to indulge his thoughts and desires without restraint? No. Good! then we shall put a stop to such desires by the commandments, "*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods.*" See, there we have all the laws that are prescribed for us by God, and you and every reasonable man must approve of them and acknowledge that they are necessary for the general welfare.

Let us for a moment suppose the contrary were the case; let us take away the commandments, either altogether or at least in part, and what sort of a life should we then have in the world? Suppose that children are permitted to show disrespect and give trouble to their parents as they please; that servants are allowed to disobey their masters; that subjects can revolt against their spiritual and temporal superiors; what disorder and confusion would be caused by the abolition of this one law! And if the others were abolished as well, what would be the result? If no

one were forbidden, but every one allowed to take revenge as he pleases; if there were no restraint placed on murder, adultery, unnatural crimes, theft, robbery, and injustice, what a state the world would come to! Who could trust his neighbor, when one cannot be sure of him? The world would resemble a wilderness inhabited by wild beasts, or the hell of the damned, rather than the habitation of reasoning creatures. Thus we must all confess that reason itself teaches us the necessity of the divine law to keep the world in temporal prosperity. And if God had given us no such law, all sovereigns and superiors would publish in their towns and communities those very same precepts which the Monarch of heaven and earth has given us, and would compel their subjects to observe them under severe penalties. In fact, even the civil authority punishes transgressions of this law, when they are publicly and judicially proved. Nay, almost all civil laws and ordinances tend to urge the strict observance of the divine law, simply because all who are of right mind must confess that the world cannot be kept in order without it.

But some will think: all that is true enough; but, alas, what poor, weak, miserable creatures we are! The greater number of the commandments are contrary to our natural inclinations and desires, and we are so strongly urged to transgress them, that we cannot be sufficiently on our guard. But this very objection refutes itself, for, since we are inclined by our corrupt nature to unlawful things, the necessity for their being forbidden is all the greater; otherwise all men would do those things without fear or shame, and would thereby interfere with the general well-being. For the very reason, that our inclinations are prone to do what is wrong, that wrong-doing must be forbidden, not merely for our temporal welfare, but also, which is much more important, for our spiritual welfare, in this life and during eternity.

II. The greatest happiness that a reasoning being can have in this life consists in the possession of the greatest good, that is, in the continual remembrance and love of God, and in the joy in

God that springs therefrom. For, just as the centre of the earth is the point of attraction of all heavy bodies, so God alone is the end and aim of reasoning souls; therefore, as the stone, for instance, finds no rest until it lies on the earth, so the human soul can have no true repose or true enjoyment until it is united with God. "Thou hast made us, O Lord, for thyself," are the well-known words of St. Augustine, "and our heart is restless until it reposes in thee." This we know by experience, and each one of us whose conscience is not hardened in guilt must confess that it is true. When a man has left God by committing a grievous sin, and made him an enemy, can he say with truth that he was easy in his mind even during the enjoyment of the forbidden pleasure? Must he not acknowledge that, at least after the sinful act, he was filled with uneasiness, melancholy, doubt, and anxiety? that his perturbed conscience often reproached him most bitterly, and that he often said to himself in the agony of remorse: "Ah, what have I done! I have lost the Supreme Good, I have become the enemy of God, and now he can cast me into hell when he pleases"? On the other hand he must acknowledge that he felt great interior satisfaction and joy of heart after having laid down the heavy burden of his sins in the Sacrament of Penance, because his conscience said to him: I am now a friend and child of God. Nor can it be otherwise; our true rest is in God alone, and therefore the poor servant-maid who loves God with her whole heart, is far more cheerful and happy than the king or emperor who has separated himself from God by sin.

But you will say: if God is so desirous of our love, why did he give us such a weak, miserable nature, that is so violently inclined to forbidden pleasures? Day and night almost we have to fight against ourselves in order to avoid sin. Nay, those evil inclinations make themselves felt even against our rational will, and we have great difficulty in repressing them. God has not given us a nature that is weak, corrupt, and inclined to sin; that is an effect of original sin, in which we are born. God has left those frailties in us, in order to make our happiness greater in heaven. He has pro-

posed to us the kingdom of heaven as a reward for all our labor and trouble, and we can gain it by keeping his commandments; nay, he has given us those commandments that we may have all the more joy in heaven. A good may be very great in itself, but if it costs nothing, if every one can easily get possession of it, men do not consider it worth having. The happiness and enjoyment that we gain by our own hard work is far sweeter to us than what is given to us without any merit on our part. Now, what labor or trouble would be required to keep the commandments, or what merit should we gain by keeping them, if there were neither any difficulty in the commandments themselves, nor any tendency in us urging us to transgress them? In such a case the joys and glory of heaven would, as it were, fall into our laps, and we should have no need to strive for them; therefore we could not truly rejoice in eternity, not call our glory our own, since we should have done nothing to secure it; nor could any one earn a higher degree of glory than another, since all should have an equal facility in keeping the commandments.

But why should I take such trouble to defend or palliate the difficulty there is in keeping the divine law, which is so just and so necessary to the welfare of the whole human race? Is not the beautiful heaven that God has promised us worthy of a little trouble that we can make up our minds to endure in this life, that we may be happy with God forever? Consider the pains people take, the difficulties they face, for some wretched, worthless thing, and that, too, with the greatest willingness. How the hunter plagues himself in the pursuit of game! He interrupts his sleep early in the morning, and is out before sunrise; he thinks nothing of enduring hunger, thirst, cold, rain, and snow for the length of a day; he runs through hedges and bushes, climbs high mountains, descends into deep valleys, and all that for the sake of killing a miserable hare; that is all he gains by it, and yet he calls that labor a pleasure and a delight. And must we look on the delights of heaven as deserving of less trouble, as being less able to sweeten a much lighter toil? The workman is satisfied when

he finds an employer who will certainly pay him the proper wages at the proper time, and he works contentedly for such a man. The tradesman, too, is always most anxious to have some work to do, and he begs for it, if he cannot have it otherwise, in order to be able to make a little money and support himself and his family.

But God has difficulty enough to find any one who will serve him, if there is the least obstacle in the way. God, who will infallibly pay the wages, who has promised an eternal reward for a temporal service, has made but one condition in promising his reward, and that is, that we keep his law, a law which every sound mind must regard as necessary; but most of us complain of that condition, and find it too hard. We prefer to remain in the slavery of our corrupt flesh and its brutish desires, or to do the will of the perverse world, or to groan under the yoke of the devil, and thus to carry a far heavier burden, and lead a far harder life, which after a few years will end in the flames of hell, rather than to take up his sweet yoke by keeping his law and so secure for ourselves eternal happiness through a sheer imaginary fear of a little mortification which the observance of his law occasionally renders necessary. Such, my dear brethren, are the blindness and folly of men, which can hardly be sufficiently understood, never sufficiently bewailed.

EASTER SUNDAY.

THE HONOR GIVEN TO GOD BY PATIENCE IN ADVERSITY.

"*You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.*" Mark 16: 6.

Would it not have been enough for the Angel to say: You seek Jesus of Nazareth without mentioning that hateful word crucified? Those words would have enabled the holy women to understand who was risen from the dead. The world hates the cross as an instrument of shame; but Christ placed his greatest honor and glory in it, saying to his disciples when he announced to them

his approaching Passion and death : "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." It was by the cross that Jesus gave most honor and glory to his heavenly Father ; it was by the cross that he wished to make the glory of his resurrection still more evident to the world. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into his glory ?" The name of the cross of adversity in this life is hateful to our natural inclinations. But considered in the light of faith we shall find that we, too, can give no greater honor and glory to God, Jesus Christ, and even to ourselves, than by patiently bearing the cross of adversity, as I shall now show to the consolation of all who are afflicted.

By patiently bearing the cross of adversity we give great honor and glory to God : therefore we should consider it an honor and glory for ourselves to be visited with many trials in this life.

The honor and glory that God expects from us consists in this chiefly, that we submit completely to God, obey him willingly in all possible circumstances, are always resigned to his holy will and decree, and thus acknowledge before the world God's supreme sovereignty. For you must know, God is not in the least need of his creatures, and he has placed his exterior glory in this, that his creatures are always ready to do, to omit, and to suffer whatever and as long as he wills them to do to omit, and to suffer. But never does man show this full submission and obedience clearer, or better than in the trials that he accepts from the hand of God, and bears patiently for his sake.

1. To be always in good health and prosperity ; to have an abundance of worldly goods ; to enjoy a good name and the esteem of men ; to live in constant peace, pleasure, and quiet ; that is a state that is most in conformity with our nature and all its inclinations, and the object of the sighs and desires of many men. See, I say to you ; see how satisfied and resigned to the will of God that man is, who has everything he can wish for ; how completely

he accepts all the divine decrees ; how respectful and obedient he is to the law of God ; how thankfully he receives the benefits bestowed on him ; how zealous and diligent he is in attending church and practising devotion, hearing the word of God, and frequenting the holy Sacraments ; how carefully he brings up his children in the service of God. Is he not a good Christian ? Truly he is, and a real example of piety ; for they who receive most temporal benefits from God are generally the most ungrateful to him, and make use of his gifts for purposes of pride, vanity, dissipation, and vice. But that man is good and pious, and always united with the will of God. Does he not honor and glorify his Creator by the Christian life he leads, and by his resignation to the divine will ? Without a doubt he does ; but at the same time you cannot help thinking : if I were as well off as that man, I, too, should be satisfied with the will of God, and should willingly thank and serve him. For it is natural to accept readily that which we like, and to be satisfied with one who gives us everything we wish for.

2. Now look at that other man, and see what misery he has to suffer for such a long time. Consider that poor tradesman ; how he has to work hard the whole day long to get dry bread enough for himself and his family ; that unfortunate citizen, who never has luck in anything he puts his hand to, so that wherever he turns he finds the cross. Consider that poor widow with her family of little children, who has no friends to console her, and is moreover exposed to the attacks of her bitter enemies ; that wife, who in addition to the poverty she has to bear daily is also tormented by a drunken, good-for-nothing husband, who curses and beats her ; that person who has now been for many years in bed suffering great pain. Truly their state has nothing conformable to our senses and desires, but everything in direct opposition to our natural inclinations ; but those people are nevertheless just as satisfied as the other in their state, just as resigned and submissive to the will of God ; they willingly follow our Lord on the rugged way of the cross, as well as the other who has a road strewn with roses and

flowers. While he thanks God for riches, health, and other blessings bestowed on him, they praise, bless, and honor God by their humble submission for the trials and sufferings he sends them. Never do they give the least sign of impatience; and although nature cannot help groaning under the weight of the cross, which presses out sighs from their hearts and tears from their eyes, yet amidst all their weeping and lamentation, they never utter a word but to signify their complete obedience to the will of God. Lord, thy will be done! is their prayer; I am satisfied with what thou hast decreed for me! What honor and glory for God to have such servants! One of them gives more praise and honor to God than a hundred of those who serve him in prosperity. Even a heathen philosopher cries out at the sight: "Behold a spectacle worthy of being looked at by God! Behold a pair worthy of God: a patient man laden with misfortune."

3. And so it is. When I represent to myself a Job, who was so richly endowed with wealth and honors that his like was not to be found in the whole East, and who led such a holy, innocent life, offering every morning a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God; when I represent to myself a Tobias, who as the chief man of his tribe was held in high honor, how grateful he was to God, how diligent in going daily to the temple to adore the one true God, how zealous he was in practising the works of mercy, in feeding the hungry, and burying the dead. I am indeed rejoiced at the honor and glory thus given to God; but I do not wonder much at it, for I cannot help thinking that it is an easy thing when you are endowed with wealth and honor and crowned with victory to appear before the altar to show your gratitude and kiss the bounteous hand that has been so generous to you.

But when I remember that the same Job after losing all his children, his cattle, his houses, his lands, his wealth, after being covered with wounds and sores from head to foot, and being abandoned by all, and left to sit on a dung-hill, still praised and blessed God: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; as it

hath pleased the Lord so is it done ; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1 : 21) ; when I remember how Tobias was deprived of his sight, and thus blind and helpless was exposed to the mockery of his friends and even of his own wife, and yet how he praised and blessed God, rejoicing in the hope of eternal goods, and saying to his son : "We lead indeed a poor life, but we shall have many good things if we fear God, and depart from all sin, and do that which is good" (Tob. 4 : 23) ; when I hear him in his blindness, not merely abstaining from all complaint, but even thanking God for it. When I consider how those great men thought and acted under such circumstances, then I am compelled to cry out, "God is wonderful in his saints" (Ps. 47 : 36).

4. They who serve God in prosperity are to my mind like the attendants and courtiers of a king, who are always at the side of their royal master, accompany him wherever he goes, whether it is to the chase, to the theatre, or to the table ; dressed in magnificent array, they pay him their respects early and late, and await his commands. But they who serve God in adversity are like those brave soldiers and heroes who fight for their king far away from his presence, and risk their lives and shed their blood for him in the open air, in heat and cold, amidst constant dangers from sword and bullet, daring death daily from fire and sword. Which of these two classes of men give more honor to their king ? There is no doubt that one heroic act performed by a soldier at the risk of his life during a siege or a battle makes the king more glorious than all the attendance and waiting of the courtiers. For the latter only make a vain show and parade about their sovereign's person ; while the former by their valor make him illustrious as a conqueror, increase his kingdom, extend his power, and make him respected and feared by his enemies and by other monarchs.

5. To pray long and frequently, to hear Mass daily, to give alms to the poor, and perform other good works of the kind, that, according to most people, is the proper way to be pious and to

honor God. It is true those works are laudable, by them we acknowledge our duty to God, and make parade before him, as it were; but I can say without hesitation that one "May thy will be done," spoken from the heart in sorrow and trial, brings more honor to God than a whole bookful of prayers, or all the outward works of devotion that one performs when things are prospering with him. Not to be impatient when we have all we wish for; not to be angry when no one contradicts us; not to hate, when no one injures us; these are virtues found even in heathens who know nothing of the Christian doctrine: "Do not also the heathens this?" Even the devil pays no regard to such virtue. As long as holy Job was prosperous, the wicked spirit had no great respect for him. The Lord asked him, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a simple and upright man, one that feareth God and avoideth evil?" But, replied the demon, is any credit due to him for that? He serves thee in a house filled with everything, with riches, pleasures, servants, and good friends. "But stretch forth thy hand a little," visit him with trials, and then thou shalt see if he will remain faithful to thee. And so it is. Certain virtues that are practised in prosperity are not much to be wondered at. Many a one lives a chaste life with a wife who enjoys all the love of his heart; many a one gives alms, but he is so rich that he does not miss what he gives; many a one never gets angry, because he has no occasion for anger; many a one never nourishes hatred, because no one persecutes him. We must not imagine that these are great virtues. But to be contented and cheerful in the midst of poverty and persecutions, to rejoice at thus having an opportunity of becoming more like the poor and persecuted Christ; to be glad of contempt, shame, and disgrace, because we thus follow the despised Christ; to bear sickness and suffering willingly and thank God for having given us an opportunity of suffering with our Lord, that is a virtue which makes men dear to God and the Angels; a virtue which renders the greatest honor to God, to Christ our Redeemer.

Let no one be so ignorant of the designs of God as to think that the trials he sends us are intended to injure us. Let no one be so rash as to complain of God as a hard task-maker, because he sends us sufferings. Let no one be so foolish as to make his cross heavier by refusing to bear it patiently. If the cross brought us no other advantage but that of enabling us to further the honor and glory of our great God, should we not accept it with joy and thanksgiving as a glorious pledge from the hand of God, and like St. Paul boast of nothing but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ? Let us at least bear our trials with patience for the honor of God; in any case we must suffer them; let us do so, then, with the consolation and firm hope that we shall one day be honored in the glorious resurrection, and shall be exalted to eternal joys in heaven by him whom we have honored by suffering for a short time on earth.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE REASONS WE HAVE FOR CONSTANTLY RECOLLECTING THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

"*Jesus came and stood in the midst.*" *John* 20:19.

We enjoy the happiness of having God present in our midst, wherever we may be, although we cannot see him with our bodily eyes. God is present with us at all times, in all places; but are we at all times, in all places present with God by constantly recollecting him and his divine presence? Not by any means! The church is generally the place, our hour for prayer generally the time in which we think of God; the remainder of the day is devoted to other thoughts and ideas. To try to think of God often, and to walk constantly in his presence, is, to our mind, fit only for holy and perfect people, and for religious in their convents, who have nothing else to care for the whole day. Yet all of us, no matter what we are, should practise this holy recollection

of God's presence, and keep him constantly before our eyes; there is nothing more reasonable if we consider it as far as God is concerned; nothing more useful if we consider our own salvation; nothing more consoling, even in the calamities of this life, than the constant recollection of God's presence; in other words

I. We should often think of God, and keep his presence always before us, because we are human beings.

II. We should do so because we are Christians.

God, who is infinite wisdom, who does nothing without a reason, and has made nothing in vain, cannot provide us with a means unless he wishes at the same time that we should make use of it for the end to which he has created it. Now, when he created us human beings, he gave us understanding, will and memory, that we might remember God himself, know him, and with this knowledge love him with all our hearts. That duty is so proper to man, that when he neglects it he does not lead a human life, nay, he has lost the nature and the being of a reasoning creature: "Fear God and keep his commandments *for this is all man*" (Eccles. 12 : 13), that is to know, honor, and love God, therein does man chiefly consist, and he who neglects that cannot properly be called a man.

Therefore as human beings we are bound to use our understanding to this end, and to keep before our memory the omnipresent God. When and how often shall we do that? Perhaps once or twice a day, when we are engaged in prayer? If that were the case, the Lord could not expect us to do more than remember him during those times; if he granted us the use of our eyes only for a quarter of an hour during the day, we could see only for that time. But just as during the whole day our eyes borrow the light in order to see visible, created things whenever we will, so our understanding and memory, as long as they are in a sound state, receive the inward light necessary to recognize him as our Creator. Therefore we should always have the omnipresent God before our memory.

What is easier for a man than to think of God? Nay, I might ask is it possible ever to forget him, unless we deliberately shut him out of our memory? Is it possible for us to keep our eyes open and not to see during the daytime?—for wherever we turn, we find some visible object. Now, everything we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, touch with our hands, and perceive with our senses reminds us of him and brings him before our memory. If we look up to heaven, it reminds us of its Creator, and speaks with its lights and stars of the glory of God. If we cast our eyes down to the earth, it reminds us of its Creator, and tells us of the wonderful power of God by the countless variety of creatures that are in it. If we consider ourselves, our souls and bodies call out to us: All that you are and have, you have received from God. In a word, everything in the world is a voice that cries out to us: "Remember thy Creator."

How, then, is it possible that we do not often, nay, always, think of him, whom the whole world, with all that is in it, constantly represents to our memory? Where are we, then, when we allow a long time to go by without thinking of God? Are there perhaps certain times when we cease to be rational creatures, so that we need use our reason for only a few moments during the day, and when that short time is at an end, again relapse into the condition of little children? Sometimes, to quiet a child, a book is given to it; it takes the book and turns over the leaves and plays with it for a whole hour without being a whit wiser than before. What is the cause of that? In one place it finds a long word, in another a pretty red letter, in a third a picture. The latter is what takes the child's fancy; it studies and ponders over it; but it cannot understand the letters. Try to explain them and say: see here my child; that is German, that is French, that is Latin,—the child will hear what you say and will attend to it, but not a word will it understand. Are we not like that, my dear brethren, when we sometimes allow half a day to pass without thinking of God? A large book is always placed before our eyes, the book of Nature that is, heaven and earth; all the creatures therein are so many

letters and words that explain to us the wisdom, omnipotence, providence, and other perfections of God; so many voices that cry out to us: "Remember thy Creator." We hear the voices and attend to them, for they make an impression on our outward senses; but we do not understand the language in which they speak to us of God. Our thoughts, cares, and speculations are concerned with what we see in the creatures themselves with which we have to do; we are satisfied with begging from them some sensual gratification or temporal benefit; but we rarely think of God who is always present and working in those creatures, although we ought to raise our thoughts higher than what we see around us.

Man has no greater benefactor than God. No better or more loving father. No more faithful and affectionate friend. Can he find any one who thinks so constantly of him as God? Whatever we have in and outside ourselves is his free gift. To him we must attribute it that we are alive and in good health. God bears us in his arms like a loving mother, to protect us from all dangers of soul and body. He is in the earth to support us; in the water to cleanse us; in the air to refresh us; in the fire to warm us; in the sun to enlighten us; in our food and drink to nourish us; in our clothing to cover us. Thus the great God is always occupied with us, although he is not in the least want of us, and would be just as happy as he now is if we never existed. Nay, through all eternity he never turned his thoughts away from us for a moment, and attended to us as if he had nothing else to do. Just as not a single moment passes in which we do not enjoy the fruits of the divine liberality, so also we should not allow a single moment to pass in which we do not keep the thought of God fresh before our minds.

II. A Christian is more in the sight of God than a mere human being endowed only with natural gifts; for the Christian is raised above his nature by the grace he receives in Baptism, and therefore is bound to perform all his actions, not only in a rational manner according to the natural light of reason, but also in a

supernatural manner according to grace, with a supernatural spirit, for a supernatural end, that is, for God. It is an undoubted fact, too, that since the Passion and Death of Christ, after having received the grace of God, after having solemnly sworn fealty to Christ in Baptism, the Christian is bound to follow Christ as his model in all things and to strive for far higher perfection than a man in former times under the law of nature, or even under the written law of the Jews, was bound to do. The Jew under the law of Moses was, so to speak, nothing better than the slave and bondsman of the Almighty; the Christian is the dear friend and child of God. The Jewish law was kept in the spirit of fear and trembling; the Christian law is a sweet yoke and a light burden that is to be borne in the spirit of love and child-like confidence. The Jewish law was announced by mere men; the Christian law is published by God himself. The sacrifices of the Jews were a mere imperfect shadow and figure of that most holy sacrifice in which we offer our God himself on the altar. The sacraments of the Jews were a mere imperfect shadow and figure of our holy Sacraments, by which we share in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ.

Now, if even the Jews under the Old Law were most diligent in keeping God before their eyes and in walking constantly in his presence; if their Prophets by the command of God often exhorted them thereto; if God himself commanded them to that end; nay, if even under the law of nature, which was far more imperfect than the Jewish law, that practice was common; how can we believe that we are dispensed from observing it? Has Jesus Christ perhaps left this holy and useful practice out of his most perfect law of love, just as he has abolished so many ceremonies and customs of the Old Law? Hear what he himself says in the Gospel, and then you will see that he has prescribed this practice in a still more perfect manner: "Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times" (Luke 21 : 36). When? In the morning, when you get up? In the evening, when you are retiring to rest? In the church, when you are hearing Mass? Before and after meals? No; "at all times;" without ceasing, as long as you are awake. "We ought

always to pray and not to faint" (Luke 18: 1). But how can we do that? Must we spend the whole day in the church on our knees? If so, things will fare badly in our households. Must we always have the prayer-book or the rosary beads in our hands when we are at home? If so, what is to become of the work? How are tradesmen to earn their daily bread? Must we always keep our lips moving in prayer to God? But how could we eat and drink then, or carry on conversation? No, such is not the case. What is prayer? An elevation of the mind and thoughts to God. But must we, then, always actually think of God, and never let the thought of him out of our memories? Neither is that required. The meaning is that we should think of God as often at least as our business permits; that we must frequently, in the midst of our business, raise our minds to him and offer up our actions to his honor. If we neglect this we do not live as honorable men, much less as true Christians.

Judge from this now yourself, whoever you be, who at most are satisfied with raising your thoughts to God for a moment in the morning, and making in a careless manner the good intention, if you have even that much good sense, thus paying the Lord for the whole day, while you bury yourself so deep in your cares, business, and troubles that God has hardly a thought from you, until, wearied with worldly affairs, you are about to retire to rest; judge I say, what sort of a life you are leading, whether your actions are according to the instructions of Jesus Christ and are directed to imitating him and to the attainment of your last end; nay, whether they are consistent with human reason. Judge whether you know and are grateful to that sovereign Benefactor, who is busy with you the whole day, and who has to preserve you in life every moment by his help and coöperation. Judge whether you love God as you ought with your whole heart, since you exclude him from your thoughts for such a long time.

Henceforth God should be the sole object of our thoughts. When we awake in the morning, our first thought shall be for God; and we should say: Behold me, O my Creator, ready to do thy

holy will to-day. When dressing, let us bless God, and humbly beg of him to clothe our souls with the nuptial robe of charity, and to keep us in his grace to the end. Never let us begin anything without directing all our actions to him by a supernatural intention. No work, nor business, nor labor should we perform of which he is not the beginning, the middle, and the end in our thoughts. If things go well with us we should not forget our Benefactor, but say; "thanks be to God!" If trouble comes upon us, we should turn to him, and resigning our will into his hands, say with our Lord: Yea, Father, thy will be done. In the evening God should be the last in our thoughts before we go to sleep, after having thanked him for all his benefits. Thus we should spend the whole day, nay, our whole life, in his presence and friendship, and make even now a beginning of that happy eternity in which we desire and hope to see and love him our Supreme Good, forever and ever. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

WE MUST AVOID VENIAL SIN, BECAUSE IT IS SMALL.

"*That we, being dead to sins, should live to justice.*" 1. *Pet.* 2 : 24.

The Son of God became man and died on the cross not merely to free us from the eternal death to which we were doomed by original sin, but also, that we might die to sin and live to justice. Is it not strange that a man can still offend his God, when he remembers that the same God had to die on the cross to atone for sin? Yet how often is not that God who was crucified for us offended by most men in the most grievous manner, and thus nailed again to the cross? But I have nothing to say to such men now. I will confine myself to just Christians, who have the name of being pious and of wishing to serve God faithfully. How many even of these act against the will of God, not indeed by indulging in mortal sin, but by committing wilful venial sins, because they are small in

themselves. Now, I acknowledge that venial sin is a small thing in itself, and that, too, in a twofold sense :

I. Because it is committed in a trifling matter of little importance and for a trifling reason which is not of much account.

II. Because it can easily be blotted out and is easily forgiven by God. But from those very reasons I shall now prove that he who commits a venial sin with full knowledge and consent is all the less to be excused and offers a greater insult to God.

I. Venial sin is and remains a small sin, which is committed in a trifling matter from a trifling cause ; this we know very well, and so we make no account of it. Again venial sin is small, and is committed for some trifling reason ; but, mark well, it is precisely on that account that we are less to be excused, and that the Lord God has more cause to complain of us when we commit that sin wantonly and wilfully. If something great were to be gained or avoided by venial sin, still it should not be committed. And what excuse shall I bring forward for your conduct and mine in so easily and wantonly committing certain venial sins ? A distracted thought in prayer that we notice and do not put away, so that we choose the sin and thereby offend God. A useless word that we do not wish to keep to ourselves, so that we trouble our good Saviour by sinning against charity. A curious look that we do not wish to refrain from, so that we do not hesitate to offend the all-seeing God who is looking at us. A slight sloth in the divine service that we do not wish to amend ; human respect, or vain honor, for which the honor and glory of God must suffer ; an annoyance that we do not wish to bear with patience, a word that displeases us, and which we wilfully resent. For trifles of that kind, and a thousand others that are still more insignificant, we do not fear to go against the will of God daily and hourly. Is that not what the Lord complains of by the prophet Ezechiel : "And they violated me among my people for a handful of barley, and a piece of bread "(Ezech 13 : 19); for a trifling, a wretched thing they have insulted and disobeyed me.

Since it is such a small thing, since, as we maintain, so little depends on it, why do we refuse such trifles to a God who is worthy of all honor and love? Why do we not give these small things to the God who for our sake assumed human nature and offered himself as a victim for our salvation on the cross? Truly, we deserve the reproach that the servants of Naaman addressed to him when he complained of being ordered by the prophet Eliseus to wash seven times in the Jordan in order to be cured of his leprosy. "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, surely thou shouldst have done it;" if he had told you to undertake something difficult in order to be healed,—for instance, to give away half your property, to set out on a long and dangerous journey, to take bitter medicines,—surely you would have obeyed him, to get rid of your loathsome disease and to be restored to your former good health. "How much rather what he now hath said to thee: Wash and thou shalt be clean"? (4. Kings 5 : 13.)

We deserve the same reproach, my dear brethren. Great as God is, he now and then requires something very small from us; for instance, he wishes us to restrain our loquacious tongues, with which we often criticise and find fault with others, and speak of them behind their backs. He wishes us to abstain from jocose lies, which certainly do not profit us anything; to mortify our curious eyes and keep them from beholding dangerous objects; to moderate our anger and displeasure when anything is done to annoy us; to keep from talking and looking about in church. Now, if we do not obey him in these things, if we refuse him the trifles he asks for, then we are all the more inexcusable, more despicable in ourselves, more unjust and ungrateful to God, our best friend, from whom we have received everything that we have and are. Can he not complain of us in the words in which the Church complains in his name of the ingratitude of his people: My people, my Christian people, what have I done to you, that you should so contemptuously refuse me that small service? I have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the blind heathenism in which so many thousands have been left, into the true light of the Catholic

Church ; I have fed you with bread from heaven, with my own Flesh and Blood, and I have strengthened you with my sacraments; I have planted you as a chosen vineyard, and have expected to gather good and agreeable fruits from you. But now you are become too bitter to me. You must know that those small sins that you so carelessly commit daily and hourly are more bitter to me than the gall and vinegar that the Jews gave me to drink. I shower down benefits on you constantly, but I cannot induce you to grant me a trifling favor, to give up for me a small thing that is of no use to you. I do everything for the welfare of your soul ; but you do not hesitate to displease me daily by your misconduct. It is only a small offence against God, you think ; therefore it does not much matter. Is that the way in which you treat me as a friend ?

Because venial sins are small, we commit them over and over again, we commit them through habit, and bring them again and again to confession, but never truly amend them or lessen their number. We commit them without fear or anxiety ; we make a boast of not being scrupulous like others. Nay, we commit them and meanwhile contemn the mercy and goodness of God ; for we make little account of them because they do not entail eternal punishment, and are easily pardoned. See, there you have another degree of malice in the wanton commission of venial sin, so that we have no great punishment to fear.

2. God has before now severely punished venial sin. Have you forgotten what happened to Moses for having doubted whether the water would come out of the rock on his striking it with his rod, as God had commanded him ? Was he not on that account excluded from the Promised Land ? Have you forgotten what happened to Nadab and Abiu, when they put strange fire in their censers ? Were they not consumed by fire on the spot, in punishment of that act of thoughtlessness ? Have you forgotten the severe chastisement inflicted on David, for a single sin of vanity he was guilty of in numbering his people ? Did not that act of his cost seventy thousand of his subjects their lives ?

Have you forgotten what happened to Oza, when he put forth his hand to support the ark, lest it should fall? Was he not punished by being struck dead on the spot? All these faults were small and venial, and they were committed only once and for the first time. What sort of a punishment have we not to dread, then, for sins that we wilfully commit every day and make no account of, for sins that we make a habit of and multiply until they are beyond counting, that we never really repent of and amend, although we often go to confession and holy Communion?

Descend in thought into purgatory, and see the immense number of souls there; some of them have been confined there for five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years, and who are those souls? They are all friends of God, and kings, heirs of heaven, who have a right to the vision and possessions of the highest Good. What keeps those souls so long in that prison? What fearful crime have they committed against God? A venial sin, and if we could interrogate those souls, they would answer us to that effect. One would say: a small lie that did no one any harm, and that I did not do penance for during my life, is the cause of my being here; another would attribute his punishment to his culpable carelessness and wilful distractions in prayer; another to vanity in dress and trying to attract attention, although that vanity was not the cause of scandal; another to the habit of suspecting and finding fault with his neighbor, giving way to impatience in daily crosses, committing small sins against Christian charity, and this class of sins is what most of them would confess to. This, they would say, is what keeps us here; this is the bolt that shuts against us the heaven that belongs to us; this the sole reason why we must burn so long in this fire.

I know, my dear brethren, that this thought makes but little impression on our minds; as a general rule purgatory does not frighten us much, and therefore we often hear people say, and indeed it is the sentiment of the greater number, what matter if we have to go to purgatory? We shall not stop there long, and we shall be sure in any case of going to heaven; I wish I was only

sure of going there, even if I were to be put next to hell itself; I am not afraid of purgatory, but they may think and say what they like; all sensible men ought to be frightened when they consider that one venial sin is enough to keep even the holiest soul from the enjoyment of happiness, so that, if such a sin could remain forever on the soul, and there was no atonement offered for it, that soul should be forever deprived of the beatific vision. This alone should convince us that the punishment inflicted by God on venial sin is not a small but a very terrible one.

But I will say nothing to-day of the just punishment of venial sins; but will admit that, since it does not last forever, it seems tolerable enough to us. I grant moreover that they are easily remitted in this life, but for that very reason the injury and offence offered to God is all the greater when we commit such sins deliberately. For, how comes it that we make such a difference between mortal and venial sin? We avoid the former with all our strength if we have any conscience left, and we so wantonly commit the latter daily and hourly. What is the reason of that? Is it not because on the one side God is infinitely just and pursues mortal sin with an infinite hatred, casting us off on account of it and condemning us to the eternal pains of hell, and we are in dread of this justice; while on the other side God is infinitely good and merciful, is not so severe against venial sin, and we deliberately commit that sin on account of his goodness and mercy, as if we said to his very face: O just God, I know that thou wilt give me over to the demons, and send me to hell on account of this grievous injustice, this impure act, this intemperance and deliberate drunkenness, this revenge and injury inflicted on my neighbor, this calumny and detraction, this cursing and swearing which really comes from the heart, this scandal and leading the souls of others astray; therefore I will be careful not to commit such sins. But in other matters I need not be so careful; this or that is but a venial sin; I know thou art a good Lord, and wilt not be hard on me for it; it will not cause me to lose thy grace and friendship altogether; the punishment I have

to expect for it is small and will not last long, while thou hast given me a thousand means of getting rid of it at any moment. Venial sins, then, make no great matter; I will commit them as they come, without scruple, although I know well that they offend thee. Ah, how unjust that is! "Is thy eye evil, because I am good?" is the answer that our Lord gives us (Matt. 20: 15).

But what a shame that is! Away with those dishonorable, boorish, mean-spirited souls, who always think and say, when there is question of doing something that their consciences are not quite easy about, is this or that a mortal sin? while they do not trouble themselves in the least as to whether it is a venial sin or not! Away with you! I say. You do not deserve the name of loving children and true friends of God; you are rather slaves and bondsmen; for you do not wish to serve God unless he comes with the rod or the sword in his hand and threatens to force you to obey him. You respect, reverence, and fear nothing in him but the fact of his being able to hurl you into the terrible fire of hell, which he will undoubtedly do, unless you repent and amend your life. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

CONSOLATION IN ADVERSITY.

"*Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*" *John* 16 : 20.

"You shall lament and weep; but Your sorrow shall be turned into joy," therefore be not disturbed, nor frightened at the thought of the sorrow. Hear this, pious Christians, who now live in trials and adversity, resigned to the will of God! Be comforted! your sorrow shall be turned into joy! Hear this, pious Christians, who now mortify your senses by voluntary penances and austerities! Only continue as you have begun; not only shall your sorrow be turned into the eternal joys of the next life, but also in this life you shall have joy in return for your sorrow, for

I. Patience in adversity, penance, and mortification of the senses, bring to the servant of God in this life a supernatural joy, and

II. A natural joy.

The Apostles teach that we can have joy and consolation in trials and mortification. St. James says : "My brethren, count it all joy,"yes, nothing else but joy ; what ? When everything goes according to your natural wishes and inclinations ? No ; but "when you shall fall into divers temptations"(James 1 : 2). When you are sunk in a sea of troubles, and all sorts of trials to sustain, then your joy should be at its height. St. Peter gives us a similar lesson : "If you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice" (1. Pet. 4 : 13). "I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses" (2. Cor. 12 : 10). "Who now rejoice in my sufferings" (1. Coloss 1 : 24). Nay, he even ventures to say : "I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation" (2. Cor. 7 : 4). Paul was as joyful in his sufferings as if he were in a paradise of delights ; and although he had the great happiness of being rapt up to the third heaven, and seeing the bliss of the elect, yet he never rejoiced at that, but only at trials he had to bear, on which he congratulated himself.

Now you will understand how the martyrs of Christ were able to laugh and sing so joyfully in the midst of the most cruel torments ; how so many other Saints, and even tender women, longed so earnestly for the cross, and were not satisfied till it was given them ; nay, if the cross laid upon them seemed insufficient, they tortured themselves with iron chains, hair-shirts,rods, and scourges, nor would they have changed those penances for any worldly delights. Ask a St. Teresa, a St. Catharine of Sienna, a St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, if she is tired of her cross, and you will hear how Teresa preferred to die rather than to be without suffering. Let me, O Lord, she used to pray, either suffer or die. You will see Catharine holding the crown of thorns with both hands, and refusing to change it for any earthly crown. You will hear

Magdalene expressing the wish to live longer, solely for the purpose of being able to bear the cross longer, to suffer, not to die. "To him that overcometh," to him that conquers himself, "I will give the hidden manna. . . which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it" (Rom. 8 : 18).

Can there be a greater consolation for a reasoning being than that which he finds in God, his Creator? Everything seeks and finds its rest and pleasure in that to which it has a natural inclination. This we see even in senseless and lifeless things. Throw a ball into the air, and as soon as the force that impelled it is exhausted, it sinks back again, and does not find rest until it is on its proper element, the earth; and if you were to dig away the ground from under it, it would follow you until it reached the centre. The magnet has such an attraction towards the north, that if you rub a needle on it, it will constantly turn to the north also. Turn it round and round as you will, now in this way, now in that, it will not rest and will continue to agitate itself as if it had life, until it again looks towards the north, its centre and point of rest; then and then only it remains quite still and immovable. Now, there is not amongst all created things a more powerful impulse and inclination than that which urges the heart of men to God, in order to be united with him and to rejoice in him: "Thou hast made us, O Lord, for thyself, and our heart is uneasy until it rests in Thee!"

Without God there is no true joy. Seek out, O sensual, luxurious man, whatever there is on earth to delight your eyes, to charm your ears, to tickle your palate, to gratify your senses, to delight your flesh; and having found it, pile it all up in a heap, and then tell me honestly whether you are truly contented and satisfied? You must acknowledge that you have grasped at nothing but empty air and deceitful vanity, as the prophet says: "O ye sons of men, why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?" You will be just as uneasy as before, and will have to seek after some new pleasure. Nor is that any wonder, for amongst all things that the world can offer you there is nothing for which you are created. One thing

is still wanting to you. From this it is clear that man can find no greater joy, no more perfect consolation than in and with his God. That only is solid joy which comes from the Creator and not from the creature.

And such is still the experience of those who for God's sake mortify themselves, and say with determined will : Lord, thy will be done ! I accept this from thy divine hand ; I will bear it and be satisfied with it, because it is so pleasing to thee. I am sure that many are a thousand times more cheerful in their poverty than the rich are in possession of their wealth and treasures ; many who are a thousand times more satisfied in their mean and lowly condition than great lords are in their high dignities ; many who have incomparable more pleasure in the observance of chastity, and in bodily austerities, than others find in sensual enjoyments ; many who thank God for having deprived them of earthly joys, and even envy others who have more to suffer than they have. Nor can it be otherwise. The words of God cannot deceive ; and he has expressly promised that they who for his sake renounce temporal consolations shall receive a hundred-fold more than they have given up. It must be so, for that only is solid joy which comes from the Creator, and not from the creature ; which is not begged of the outward senses, but sought in the centre and resting-place of our hearts. What I have said up to this has been addressed only to those who know by experience what it is to rejoice in God, and to have heavenly consolation. To the sensual children of the world such things are but riddles, and they are as little capable of forming an opinion of supernatural joy as a blind man is of pronouncing on the merits of a fine picture of which he cannot make the least image in his mind. Now I will show you that patience in adversity practised for the love of God is the cause of joy to us in this life, even as far as natural joy is concerned.

II. In what does a joyful, happy life consist ? Is it not in the inward peace, joy, and contentment of mind ? I may give my out-

ward senses all the delights they are capable of enjoying; but how will that help me to a happy life, if I am at war with myself inwardly, if my mind is disturbed and disquieted? If, on the other hand, my body is filled with pains and aches, or has to contend with hard work and discomfort, what harm will that do me, or, how can it trouble me, if I suffer willingly, and am contented and peaceful in the midst of my trials? Let us see whether this is in practice. The voluptuary is attacked, for instance, by a fever, a catarrh, a tooth-ache, or a head-ache. Oh, what a state he gets into! How he murmurs and complains, and weeps and sighs, and what a commotion he causes in the house, as if the last day were at hand! Another takes no notice of such a little thing; he bears it with patience, and remains calm and satisfied. Lord, he says, may thy holy will be done! Since we have to deal with people, we are often exposed to a word of contradiction now and then, or to some disagreeable act on the part of another. Occasionally people indulge in vituperation and contumelious language; the servants, the children, the husband or wife do not always act as they ought. The one who is not master of his passions, and knows not how to mortify himself, gives way to anger and ill-temper under such circumstances; he actually trembles with passion and his heart is full of bitterness. Thus his inward peace is disturbed; his mind is troubled. The other is master of himself at once; he keeps quiet as if nothing had happened; he rejoices at having an opportunity of overcoming himself; he preserves his peace. One is addicted to the pleasures of the table, and is intemperate; hence he has to suffer head-aches, sickness, evil humors in the blood; he shortens his life, and must expect to die before his time. Another, through mortification, keeps within the bounds of moderation, and the little food and drink he takes, tastes all the sweeter to him; he has a good appetite, after as well as before meals; he is always healthy, cheerful, and in good humor. Since a luxurious life necessarily gives rise to a carnal one, the one seeks occasions to gratify his impure passions; he thinks he has found joy therein; but what bitter pills he has to swallow before, during, and after those crim-

inal actions! His sleep is often disturbed; he has no appetite for his food; his sense of shame, his good name, his conscience, all must be sacrificed for the sake of his unruly passions. But he cares little for that; the unclean spirit has blinded his eyes, closed his ears, bewitched his heart, dulled his senses, driven away shame, darkened his understanding. Thus an uneasy conscience and the fire of hell itself are all that he has gained by his sensual indulgence, and yet he is not satiated with the sinful pleasure he enjoys. How can such a man have peace of mind! Does not the other feel far happier in the practise of chasity and mortification? And the same may be said of all other inordinate gratifications. See now from what uneasiness, annoyance, and discomfort he is free who seems to torment himself by voluntary mortification. He leads a pleasant, peaceful life on earth, even while he deprives himself of earthly pleasures; he is at peace with himself, with his fellowmen, and with his conscience, and lastly with the God whom he loves above all things.

Therefore, they deceive themselves who think that priests are too severe when they exhort people from the pulpit to practise mortification and to shun worldly pleasures and amusements, and look on them as enemies to all enjoyment. No, Christians, such is far from being the case! Never do we seek and desire to procure for you true enjoyment and pleasure more than when we exhort you to mortify your senses and evil desires, which, according to the law of faith, of reason, and of experience itself, are the only cause of all our unhappiness when we give them loose rein. Wofully deceived, then, are they who consider that the vain children of the world, who indulge their sensuality, are happy. No, Christians; that cannot be! We see the roses outwardly, but the sharp thorns are hidden from us. "They spend their days in wealth" (Job 21 : 13), says Job of such people; and it is true! They spend their time in eating, drinking, sleeping, amusing themselves and indulging in sensual pleasures; they have worldly goods in abundance, they gratify their senses, they deny themselves no worldly pleasure; but it is not true that their days are

days of happiness. They call out peace! peace! but all their calling cannot give them real peace. There is no peace for the world. Worst of all, then, is the error of those who imagine that the way of the cross and penance, the service of God, is so hard and bitter that it is intolerable. No, Christians, wrong again! The burden is light, the yoke is sweet, the cross is anointed, it is sweet suffering, a joyful sadness.

Only make trial of it, if you do not believe what I say; renounce the deceitful joys of the world; deny yourselves, as Christ wishes us to do. "Mortify therefore your members, mortify your outward senses, your inward desires, and you shall see the difference between the just and the wicked; and between him that serves God, and him that serves him not" (Mal. 3: 18). You will see what a great difference there is between the zealous, true, pious Christian and the tepid man who leads a careless life, and has only the name of a Christian. You will experience the great difference between the vain, transitory and merely apparent pleasure that is to be gained by sensual gratification and the true, real peace and enjoyment that comes from mortification. You will agree with St. Augustine, who at first thought it almost an impossibility to give up worldly joys and sensual pleasures; but once he had firmly resolved to serve God faithfully, and had actually commenced to practise mortification, he soon changed his opinion, and cried out in joyful tones: "Oh, how delightful it has become to me all at once to be without vain pleasures! Now I am rejoiced at losing what I formerly feared to lose!"

The crosses, troubles, and difficulties that God sends us, or will send us, we shall accept with joy, and keep in check our outward senses and evil inclinations, mortifying and chastising our flesh. We have sinned; what an immense debt we have thereby incurred with the divine Justice! We can still sin; what powerful means should we not use to avert such a calamity! Christ our Lord was never without the cross; how can we call ourselves a member of Christ under a thorn-crowned Head if we live in pleasures and delights, and still expect eternal joys hereafter? Mortification

alone can give us a quiet, peaceful life here below; why, then, should we avoid it, or hesitate to make use of it? And even if we had not all these reasons to urge us to this step, or if they should not be verified in our case; we have at all events the express promise of our Lord: "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." It should, then, suffice for us to know that our short sorrow and suffering shall be turned into an eternal joy in the glorious resurrection. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

FIDELITY TO GOD IN JOY AND IN SORROW.

"Because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow hath filled your heart." John 16 : 6.

There is a constant alternation of sweetness and bitterness, prosperity and adversity. In the morning one is good-humored and cheerful, in the evening he is sad and melancholy; to-day he enjoys the society of a good friend, to-morrow he has to contend with a bitter enemy; this week he has the greatest happiness in his family, the next, one of his loved ones is taken away by death.

This year, he says in cheerful tones, I have made a good deal of profit; the next year he sighs: what fearful losses I have had! Now his cry is: God be praised! I am well and in good health; soon after you may hear him lamenting, and complaining of the pain he has to suffer. Thus divine Providence plays with us mortals, and mingles sour with sweet, prosperity with adversity. But what is the object of that change and alternation? It is to try us, and see whether we have a well-founded virtue, and whether we really love our God with our whole heart. This is a consolation for pious servants of God, who lead holy lives, and yet have many trials and crosses to bear. God sends them to try, and to increase their virtue.

To remain steadfast in virtue and in the love of God in sorrow as well as in joy, in adversity as well as in prosperity, constitutes the true virtue and piety of a Christian.

When a man is always prosperous, and serves God faithfully, we might easily look on his virtue as somewhat suspicious, and say of him what Satan said of Job to the Lord: Thou art proud of thy servant; but without reason! Thou hast surrounded him with blessing; why, then, should he not praise and bless thee? But his praise is not sincere; it is only lip-service. On the other hand if a man has constantly to contend with suffering and adversity, and still remains devout and pious, even then we might have reason to suspect him, and to say: his devotion does not come from the heart; it is only forced; he prays to be freed from his miseries, or else since he can find no consolation on earth, he is compelled to seek it from God. Therefore to leave no room for doubt, God generally mingles sorrow with joy, prosperity with adversity, so as to see what a man's virtue really is.

It is a proof of great virtue to love God and remain true to him in the midst of crosses and trials. Therefore in many places in the holy Scriptures love is compared with gold, and adversity with fire. Thus Job says of himself: "He hath tried me as gold that passeth through the fire" (Job 23:10). "Gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation," to see whether their piety is sincere or not (Ecclus. 2:5).

Men are sometimes scandalized at this in their own minds. They are surprised to see a pious servant of God bending under the weight of many severe trials and miseries; as if they thought that God should not thus torture a soul that loves him, or else that the soul itself was not acting wisely in remaining true to him, and praising and blessing him in spite of the torments he inflicts on it. When Job was reduced to the direst poverty and had to sit on the dung-hill covered with sores, his only word was, "blessed be the name of the Lord;" but his wife mocked him: "Dost thou still continue in thy simplicity?" she said: "bless God and die" (Job

2 : 9). When the old Tobias was unfortunate, his wife too showed just as little sympathy for him : "It is evident," said she, "thy hope is come to nothing, and thy alms now appear" (Job 2 : 22); thy blindness should teach thee how vain is thy reliance on God, and thou shouldst now acknowledge that the alms have been of little good to thee. But such people do not understand the benefits of adversity ; and this very circumstance brings into still clearer light the great virtue of those who remain steadfast in the service of God in the time of trial; for being more enlightened they see that the sufferings that God sends them are nothing but proofs of his love, and real benefits, for which they therefore thank him, and love him all the more.

But it is a far more difficult and rare thing to love God sincerely in the time of prosperity, when all our wishes are fulfilled, than when we have to suffer. How so ? Although prosperity should impel a generous mind to sentiments of gratitude, although temporal goods, such as health, riches, honors, the esteem of men, and lawful pleasures are not evil in themselves, but rather opportunities given us to promote the glory of God, and to help others; yet on account of the corruption of our nature, they expose our virtue to far greater dangers than trials and crosses do. Adversity takes away from man many occasions of sin ; but prosperity brings with it all that inflames our bad desires and leads us into sin. It is, then, a great and difficult virtue to be prosperous, and yet not to allow our prosperity to get the upper hand. It is extremely difficult to be in an honorable position, and yet to be outwardly and inwardly humble ; to be rich, and yet to be poor in spirit ; to have abundance of everything, and yet not to transgress the bound of moderation ; to be in the midst of pleasures, and yet to keep one's senses in check by mortification. It is a great virtue indeed to be pious in prosperity ! In fact, it seems much easier to bear adversity patiently than to avoid losing one's soul in prosperity.

Since men are wont to do wrong in both circumstances, the truth of my proposition is made evident at all events, namely, that the virtue of that man is certainly the greatest who, being

proved in both ways, always remains faithful to God, so that he is neither elated by prosperity nor cast down by adversity; who serves his God as zealously when things go according to his wishes as when everything turns out a failure with him. For, he shows that he has a right appreciation of God and created things; he proves that he esteems nothing outside of God; that he looks on God as his only true Good, with whom alone he is satisfied; that he does not desire temporal goods, health, comfort, pleasure, riches, honors, or the esteem of men, nor use them, unless in so far as they help him to offer to God an acceptable service. Hence it is a matter of indifference to him whether he has those things or not, whether he gains or loses them. If God gives them to him, he accepts them with gratitude; but his whole heart and love still belong to God. If his health is taken from him by sickness, his joy by some trouble, his money by misfortune, his good name by disgrace, his pleasure by the death of some good friend, he is still satisfied with his God, and continues to serve him with as much zeal as ever. And that is the way to keep the chief commandment of the law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind." Not to become perverted from the service of God by the caresses of prosperity, nor to be deterred from it by adversity, that is to love him with our whole heart and soul and strength.

So it was with Job, who, when he was the richest and greatest man in all the East, was looked on by God as his most faithful servant, who had not his like upon earth, and when he lost his children, his property, and his wealth at once, and was stricken with a grievous ulcer from head to foot, abandoned and mocked at by his best friends, still remained faithful to God. "In all of these things Job sinned not by his lips, nor spoke he any foolish thing against God" (Job 1 : 22). In all his troubles, not a word of sinful complaint escaped him; all he had to say was: "If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?" (Job 2 : 10.) "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done: blessed be

the name of the Lord" (Job 1 : 21). So it was with the saintly king Louis of France, who in the midst of royal honors and riches led a pious and holy life. He was once routed in battle by the Saracens, and taken prisoner ; and what do you think he did, my dear brethren, when this great misfortune befell him? When he was brought to the room he was to occupy as a prisoner, he took his breviary into his hand, and without the least change of countenance, just as if he were in his own palace in Paris, began to read the office which he had not yet finished for the day.

But how is it with us in this respect? The Holy Ghost says : "*A holy man continueth in wisdom as the sun*" (Ecclus. 27 : 12); he who loves God sincerely continues to love, whether he is prosperous or the reverse ; he is like the sun, that never changes his light, whether it is thrown on dung or on gold. But "a fool is changed as the moon." Astronomers tell us that when the moon shows her dark side to the earth, she throws all her light upwards towards heaven ; on the other hand when her dark side is turned towards heaven, we enjoy all her light here on earth ; thus she never sheds her light equally on heaven and on earth, but as her light is withdrawn from us it increases in heaven, and as it is withdrawn from heaven it increases on earth. "A fool is changed as the moon ;" is it not so with the greater number of us, my dear brethren?

When some find the star of their fortunes darkened by trials and calamities, so that they are deprived of all earthly joy and consolation, they send the rays of their love to heaven, they seek God and adore him. But when darkness vanishes, when their trials come to an end, and the full light of prosperity shines on them, oh, how they then withdraw their light from heaven! They forget their Creator; their love, which now attaches itself to creatures and temporal things, grows cold towards God and heavenly goods. Many a one living in lowly poverty, and working hard to support himself and his family, is truly humble, meek, merciful, modest, fervent in prayer, diligent in the performance of his morning and evening devotions, in frequenting the Sacraments, in

hearing sermons and in the practice of all the other virtues ; but if fortune begins to smile on him, if he grows rich, then, humility, where art thou ? Modesty, what has become of thee ? Devotion, where hast thou vanished to ? Ah, how soon those things are forgotten, and how quickly the usages of the world are learned, and its vanities and practices adopted ! Nay, you will see many a one who after marriage fixes all his love on a creature, and hardly ever makes his appearance in church; as if he were one of the guests mentioned in the Gospel, who said : "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." "A fool is changed as the moon." So inconstant and fickle are we.

Others act in a way quite opposite to that. In the time of prosperity they are cheerful, and resigned to the will of God ; they praise and bless him, and say with joyful hearts : Lord, thy will be done ! But if they are visited by some affliction, if the husband or wife is attacked by illness, if a dear child dies, or if they have some other trial to bear, then there is an end of their resignation and contentment. God is no longer pleasing to them. Their trouble and chagrin are so great that they cannot pray. O what a heavy cross ! they exclaim. How have I deserved it from God ? They think no more of their former prosperity and of the blessing that God bestowed on them so richly in preference to many others. "A fool is changed as the moon." Whence comes this inconstancy ? Ah, from the want of trué virtue and a sincere love of God. We have not yet given ourselves to him without reserve ; we do not love him with our whole heart and soul and strength above all things. Otherwise we should be the same to him in all circumstances, in prosperity and adversity, no matter what he does with us ; so that if we were asked ; what do you wish, what do you desire on earth ? we should be able to answer with truth : I wish and desire nothing else but what God wills, and how God wills.

We must endeavor to learn this virtue to remain faithful to God in both circumstances, and we can learn it, if we frequently think of our last end, of the reason why we are on this earth,

which is none other than to love God and be happy with him forever. Therefore we must look on it as certain that all created goods, whatever be their names, such as riches, honors, pleasures, health, the love and friendship of men, are not real goods ; and we must be fully convinced that all adverse circumstances, whatever they may be, such as sickness, natural sorrow, poverty, loss of good name, abandonment by men, have not the least particle of true evil in them ; but that our true good, for which we have to strive, is the possession of God here on earth by grace, and hereafter in heaven by vision. This one supreme Good we can possess whether we are healthy or sick, poor or rich, joyful or sorrowful ; therefore we have nothing on earth to fear, hope for, or love but God; and in all circumstances God must be the object of our greatest love and esteem. Let us keep this in mind in the daily alternations of joy and sorrow to which we are exposed, and accept those trifling changes from the hand of God, offering them up to him, in conformity to his will. Thus we shall gradually learn how to be the same towards God even in changes of greater importance.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE OBJECT OF PRAYER.

"Ask, and you shall receive." *John* 16 : 24.

What is easier than asking ? What more agreeable than to receive all you ask for ? And he says it who cannot fail to fulfil his promise, for with God to will and to accomplish are one and the same thing. "Amen, amen, I say to you ; if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you." "But you ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss" (James 4 : 3). Some perhaps pray in the state of mortal sin ; others are not humble enough when they present their petitions to God ; others have not confidence enough ; others are not sufficiently in earnest, but are sloth-

ful and indifferent in their prayers; others ask for things that are too worthless and vile. All prayers of this kind are not right prayers; therefore you ask, and receive not. I do not intend to speak of all those faults of prayer to-day, but only on the last which I consider the chief cause of our prayers being fruitless:

We pray, and are not heard because the things we ask from God are too vile and worthless.

Prayer is defined in different ways. But all theologians are agreed in calling it an act of religion, a sacrifice by which God is honored. Now, when sacrifice is offered, the gift presented must be worthy of the person to whom it is offered. Cain offered him sacrifice. What did he gain thereby? "To Cain and his offering he had no respect," says the Scripture. Why? Because the offering was too vile; for Cain had selected the worst of his fruits to offer to God. Nay, all the sacrifices of the Old Law would have been vile in the sight of God, had they not been symbols and figures of that infinite sacrifice which the High-priest Jesus Christ offered of himself on the cross, and still continues to offer daily on our altars in the holy Mass. Prayer is to ask suitable things from God. Thrasilus asked king Anbigoms for a single small piece of money; the king repelled him with indignation, saying: Away with thee, thou shameless fellow, thou hast not asked for a kingly gift. So we should be careful not to ask the almighty God for vile and worthless things.

What wonder is it that so many pray much and receive little? When we look carefully at our prayers, we see that it is only vile and worthless things that we seek from God. What have we hitherto prayed for? We have had some bodily pain to suffer, or were troubled with sadness and mental anxiety, and wished to be freed from it. Some dear friend of ours was grievously ill, and we wished to see him restored to health. Our domestic affairs were not prospering, and we desired to be more fortunate. We were suffering secretly from poverty, and could not live up to what our standing required. These were the things that drove us to

church, made us fall down on our knees and hold up our hands to heaven, with bitter tears and deep sighs ; is it really worth while to ask such vile things from the great God, who can give true and spiritual goods, and who offers us what will last forever ? Is that the only request you have to make ? Away with your begging ! you do not ask a royal gift, much less a divine one becoming infinite majesty and generosity. All those temporal things are mere shadows, child's play, that are absolutely nothing in the sight of God. And that is what our Lord remarks to his disciples in to-day's gospel, when he says to them, as if reproaching them : "Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name." But the two sons of Zebedee had already asked to have the chief places in his kingdom. Peter had asked for permission to build three tabernacles on Mount Thabor. The other Apostles had made many requests. Does not that count for anything ? No ; "hitherto you have not asked anything." Their requests were only for temporal things, and those I do not regard as of any value. If you pray, ask for great things ; ask for eternal and not for transitory things ; do not pray for money, which is rust, nor for possessions, which are earth. God will not hear you, unless you ask him for what he thinks worthy of his generosity.

What did the Son of God think of temporal goods ? He did not think it worth while to look at them even from a distance. If riches, honors, prosperity, sensual joys and pleasures had seemed great goods in his sight, he would certainly have valued them and made choice of them ; for he is the Eternal Wisdom and must appreciate all things at their true value. So that, if we Christians value temporal goods so highly, and ask for them so earnestly and constantly in prayer, does it not seem as if we wished to accuse our Lord of not knowing how good they are ? Is it not a sign of great ignorance in us to make so much of that in which the Lord could find no good ? And remember that our prayer, to be efficacious, must be offered in his name ; "If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you." But how can we ask in the name of Jesus Christ when we pray for things that he has taught us to

despise, or when we ask to be freed from things in which he has taught us to seek for happiness? Earthly goods are called by him "the deceitfulness of riches "(Matt. 13 : 22); but trials he calls beatitudes : "Blessed are the poor in spirit ; blessed are they that mourn "(Matt. 5 : 3, 5); and he says that he will not look on us as his disciples unless we at least detach our hearts from all earthly goods : "Every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14 : 33). If, then, we ask for temporal goods, can we appeal to the name and authority of Jesus Christ with his heavenly Father, and expect him to bestow on us such vain things that both God himself and the Son of God consider as worthless? Plutarch tells us that Alexander the Great gave to Perillus the sum of fifty talents. Perillus, out of politeness, excused himself from accepting such a large sum, and said that ten talents would be quite enough. "What ?" exclaimed Alexander: "It might be enough for you to receive, but not for me to give ; you should remember that I am a king." In the same way, I imagine, God speaks to the Christian who prays earnestly for temporal goods. It would be enough for you, a miser, if I were to fill your coffers with money, your barns with corn, your cellars with wine ; but it is not enough for me to give. For you, an ambitious man, it would be enough if I were to give you a great name before the world ; but it is not enough for me to give. It might satisfy you, a vain child of the world, if I were to give you a long, comfortable, and pleasant life ; then, indeed, you would imagine you had a heaven on earth, and trouble yourself little about my eternal heaven ; but that would not be enough for me to give. Gold I look on as dross, honor as an empty breath, sensual pleasure as poison, a long life as a protracted imprisonment. To bestow such things as those is unbecoming my infinite majesty and sovereignty, my infinite wisdom and holiness, and is not at all enough for my infinite generosity. Therefore, if you want nothing but such trash, you may go away ; I will not hear your prayers.

Therefore, when you pray, ask for great things, for eternal, not for transitory things. Ask for supernatural, true, and heavenly

goods, for the precious gifts of his heavenly grace, for pardon of your sins, amendment of your life, purity of conscience, zeal in the divine service, and constant virtue; these are goods that do not cease with this life. They are the wares that God offers to sell you without money, and to bestow on you without measure, if you only desire them. Truly, not without reason was the Lord angry with the Israelites of old. He rained down bread on them from heaven, in which they could find all possible delights of taste, and yet they longed for the flesh-pots and garlic of Egypt, which they had when they were groaning under the yoke of Pharao. Christians, God has prepared a heavenly food for us; but we sigh and long for the garlic of the world. Our desires are fixed on earthly things; our thoughts always revert to them; we labor and fatigue ourselves for the sake of them; while we feel nothing but nausea and disgust for the heavenly and eternal goods. God does not act contrary to his promise when he refuses such paltry things to our prayers. Not that earthly things are really nothing; but when we make them the objects of our desires, they are as nothing compared to eternal life. It is neither wrong nor unlawful to ask God for temporal prosperity, health, good fortune, for God wishes that we should pray to him for those things, since by such a prayer we honor him, and acknowledge ourselves to be his creatures, who are always in want of him. If you wish to pray for temporal things, then observe at least the order fixed by Christ in the Lord's Prayer, in which the first petitions are "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;" in the fourth place comes the petition for our daily bread, while last of all we pray to be delivered from evil. "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6 : 33), namely, the things that pertain to your temporal well-being.

Let no one, then, be surprised if his prayers are frequently not heard; for he has not observed the proper order; he has given the first place to worthless, paltry things; he has set more value on earth than on heaven; his bodily welfare has wrung from

him more sighs and tears than the salvation of his soul. He is acting like king Jeroboam, who stretched forth his hand against a prophet in spite of the threats of divine vengeance that were pronounced against him; but his temerity was punished on the spot, for his hand withered up immediately. Hardly had he felt the effects of the divine anger, when he turned to the prophet and begged of him to pray to God for him; but for what? "Entreat the face of the Lord the God, and pray for me that my hand may be restored to me"(3. Kings 13: 4). See how foolishly this king acts; he is troubled and concerned on account of his hand; but he thinks nothing of the harm done his soul. How do we act, my dear brethren, when by divine decree some misfortune happens to us or those belonging to us, in our bodily well-being, or in our temporal affairs? We moan and lament; we complain of the hard times, of the sickness that we suffer from; we run to the priests; we have Masses said. Pray for me, we cry out, that I may recover my health; that the losses I have sustained may be made good. But we hardly bestow a thought on our souls; their welfare is what troubles us least, what gives us least concern. But we are totally wrong in the whole matter. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice," that is the most important of all. Pray, have Masses said, fast, give alms, that your sins may be forgiven, that you may be patient under adversity, that you may despise the world, that you may practise the Christian virtues, that you may be always resigned to the will of God, and may always have the grace to do his holy will.

Nor must the reason of our asking those things be any other than the attainment of our last end. Our principal reason for desiring them should be that we may make them conducive to the glory of God, and our own eternal welfare. How criminal it would be to make sin subservient to their attainment. We should not even ask for such delusive possessions but with a degree of apprehension, lest they should prove the cause of our spiritual ruin. When you pray for the things of this world, leave the granting or refusing of your request to God, the physician of

your soul, who knows best how to distinguish the medicine from the poison. In short in this regard adhere firmly to the rule of Christ: Seek ye, first, the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all those (temporal) things shall be added unto you, as far as they may be subordinate to your own eternal welfare. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE CONSOLATION TO BE DERIVED FROM REMEMBERING THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

"*And you shall give testimony, because you have been with me from the beginning.*" *John* 15 : 27.

All the consolation and joy of the Apostles was gone, when Jesus Christ, their only comfort, had vanished from their sight. They were standing on the mountain and looking towards heaven, just as one who wishes to accompany his departing friend a part of the way, nor did they take their eyes off him, as long as he remained in sight. This was their only remaining comfort, that at least they might continue to look at him, until the cloud hid him from them. When God is excluded from the eyes of the mind and from the heart of man, there can be no true joy nor consolation. But when God is kept constantly in the mind and the heart, there must necessarily be the greatest joy and true consolation. And that every just Christian can have if he wishes, and he can secure and enjoy the possession of it by the constant recollection of the presence of God. There is no trial or trouble in the world that cannot be assuaged and lightened for the just man by this recollection, for

I. Nothing is more consoling for the just man in spiritual trials than to remember the presence of God ; and

II. Nothing more consoling for the just man in bodily trials than to remember the presence of God.

I. The trials that affect the soul are the many dangers and occasions of sin. The Lord often permits his holiest servants to be made the objects of such attacks, in order to prove their virtue and constancy in his love, and to increase their merit in heaven; therefore he warns us: "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation" (Ecclus. 2 : 1, 5). But do not fear or be downcast. Whatever dangers or temptations assail you, your God is present with you. "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (Matt. 28 : 20), were the words which our Lord spoke to his disciples when he sent them as lambs among wolves, without scrip or staff, to wander through the world preaching the Gospel in the face of the most violent persecutions; go, said he, but be comforted; for I shall accompany you. And this one thought gave them such courage that they went through the world with joy and gladness. This one thought should console you, too, and more than suffice to strengthen you in the midst of the worst trials that can assail your souls. Why should I be afraid of twenty men who are running at me with drawn swords, if I have a hundred thousand armed soldiers surrounding me ready to fight for me? "Alas, alas, alas, my Lord, what shall we do?" (4. Kings 6 : 15) cried out the servant of the prophet Eliseus when he saw a whole army coming against them. "Fear not," said the prophet to him; "for there are more with us than with them; and the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Eliseus" (4. Kings 16 : 17).

Can any power be compared with that of God who gives himself the name of Almighty? What have we, then, to fear, as long as we are determined never to leave our God, but to keep always in his friendship? Who can harm us while he is our defender? "If God be for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8 : 31.) This appears clearly from the history of Job. How long and persist-

ently Satan had to petition the Lord before receiving permission to do Job any harm. At last he was allowed to carry out his wish ; but within certain bounds and on certain conditions, which had to be strictly observed ; for the Lord permitted Satan first to attack Job in his temporal wealth, but commanded him to spare his person. He afterwards gave Satan leave to afflict Job's body as he pleased, but strictly forbade him to interfere with his soul. How little the devil can do against us ; he is indeed a cruel executioner, but he dare not lay hands on any one until the Supreme Judge has passed sentence.

It is a great consolation for a servant of God to know that not a snare can be laid for him without the consent and permission of his good and most loving heavenly Father ! What a comfort even in the midst of dangers and temptations to have this good Father always at one's side, and to know that he is fighting against the enemies of our souls. This thought has always been a shield behind which faithful servants of God have found sure protection from the shafts of their enemies. This was the thought that encouraged *Job*, when he was so cruelly ill-treated by the devil that he became one wound from head to foot, and was reviled by his friends, ridiculed by his own wife, and forced to take refuge on a dung-hill. This was the thought that gave *Moses* such indomitable courage that he feared neither king nor tyrant. It was this thought of the presence of God that made *David* so fearless in the midst of his enemies and in dangers of all kinds both of soul and body, so that he dared to challenge all nations and all calamities to rise up against him. Encouraged by the same thought, the heroic *Machabees* engaged in a battle against an army of thirty-five thousand men, and overcame them. But, you think, is not God present everywhere in any case, and what should we have to fear in temptations ? True, but in what does his presence help me by way of consolation, if I do not remember it ? I may have a thousand armed men to protect me on my journey, but if I am travelling along a road beset with robbers and murderers I shall not be a whit more cheerful or less anxious, in spite of my strong

escort, unless I know of its existence. The least noise would frighten me, and cause me to tremble with fear lest it should be a robber coming to attack me. The two disciples that were going to Emmaus did not recognize our Lord at first, and so, although they had him in their midst, they continued to nourish gloomy and desponding thoughts. Magdalene stood in the garden and spoke with Jesus after his resurrection, but she still continued weeping bitterly for having lost the Lord. The poor cripple at the pool of Bethsaida lamented that he had no one to help him, although Jesus was standing by his side at the time and about to heal him; for he knew not our Lord. Therefore it is not the presence of God, but the frequent recollection of it which fills our hearts with a child-like confidence in the divine assistance, and thus gives a feeling of true comfort and security to the soul, and makes it courageous in spite of the attacks and snares of its enemies. The same recollection and thought of the presence of God brings comfort and consolation in bodily trials.

II. Bodily trials interfere with our well-being, and thus make life a burden to us. These trials, for the most part attack pious and just men: "Amen, amen, I say to you, that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice and you shall be made sorrowful" (John 16 : 20). The world, that is, they who love the world and live according to its maxims, will rejoice; but you, my dear children, will be visited by trials, for that is necessary for you, that you may enter into the eternal joys of heaven.

Now where will the afflicted and troubled man find this comfort and consolation in his crosses and trials? It is vain and useless to seek it from the world; for it is the Lord alone who ordains these trials and sends them down on men; and therefore it is he alone who can take them away from us, or mitigate them. We generally throw the whole blame of our suffering on men, or on accidental, natural occurrences, and therefore we break out into complaints: that man, that neighbor of mine, that husband, or wife, or child of mine is the cause of all my troubles. My poverty

or sickness comes from that misfortune, that loss, that premature death. If people had only left me alone, and had not interfered with me, I should not have to suffer this or that annoyance; I should be able to live in peace. But that will not do; we are wrong from the very first in those complaints. Nothing in this world happens by chance; no man, nor beast, nor misfortune can hurt or annoy us without consent of the almighty God. Hear how Christ himself spoke to Peter, when the latter drew the sword to defend him on the eve of his bitter Passion and Death: "The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" It is not Judas who sold me to my enemies, nor the high-priest and scribes who have taken me prisoner, nor the ungrateful people who cry out "crucify him, crucify him," nor the unjust judge Pilate who condemns me to death, nor the soldiers and executioners who scourge me, crown me with thorns, and nail me to the cross; it is not they who have prepared for me this bitter chalice of suffering; but it is my heavenly Father who has filled it to the brim with pain and sorrow, and given it to me to drink. Therefore it is God alone who lays the cross on our shoulders, and it is from him alone that we must seek consolation in bearing it.

Sinners, alas, you cannot expect any of this consolation as long as you remain in the slavery of the devil, without repentance and amendment! You have your share, as well as the faithful servants of God, in the troubles and miseries of this life; but not the slightest part of the comfort of the just falls to your lot. The very presence of God only makes your crosses heavier and more burdensome. For there is nothing more terrible to the sinner than to remember that he is in the presence of God, who sees the filth of his sins and vices, and must punish them strictly as his judge.

Let us all, my dear brethren, make trial of this, and for a time practise this keeping in the presence of God; and we shall see how sweet the Lord is, and experience that there is no sorrow or trouble in life so great that cannot be alleviated and sweetened by the constant recollection of the presence of God. Let us now begin

on earth what we hope and desire to do in heaven. In this alone does the indescribable, eternal happiness of the elect in heaven consist, that they have their God always with them, and unceasingly see him clearly and enjoy the light of his presence. If you were to take God out of heaven, or out of the minds and memories of the blessed, there would be an end of their happiness, and heaven would become a horrible hell. If God were to go down into hell, there is not an angel or a blessed soul that would wish to remain in heaven ; but all of them, if they were permitted, would descend into the abyss in order to be with the God they love and to see him, and they would have a joyful heaven in the very midst of hell.

Let us keep in the friendship of God, and like St. Paul, place our thoughts in heaven, so that like him we shall be able to say : "Our conversation is in heaven." We are in banishment, and have many evils to suffer ; but our conversation is in heaven, that is, with the Lord who makes the joy of heaven. For if it is God, and God alone, who can fully satisfy the human heart, as St. Augustine says : Thou hast made us, O Lord, for thyself, and our hearts are uneasy till they repose in thee, it follows necessarily that the more a man associates with God in this life, the more he cultivates a familiarity with him, and the greater, too, must be the consolation and joy of his heart even in this life. So it is ; the constant vision of God makes the happiness of the elect in heaven ; and the constant recollection of the presence of God makes the happiness of the human soul on earth, as far as happiness can be had here.

PENTECOST SUNDAY.

THE GRACE OF THE HOLY GHOST.

"*We will come to him, and will make our abode with him.*"
John 14 : 23.

The Holy Ghost really comes to the soul that receives sanctifying grace, and abides therein as long as that soul keeps itself in

grace. This truth is founded on the words of St. Paul: "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us" (Rom. 5 : 5); and: "Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you?" therefore, "Glorify and bear God in your body" (1. Cor. 6 : 19,20). What happiness it is for a soul in whom the Holy Ghost has taken up his lasting dwelling-place! What happiness for a poor mortal to be thus filled with the great God! But,

I. How can I know that the Holy Ghost has really come to me? and *II. If he has come to me, what am I to do that he may dwell with me always?*

I. An evident sign of the coming of the Holy Ghost is the change of the soul to a new and better state. Let each one ask himself, now is it with my heart? what does it say to me? Have I at last truly amended my life, according to the sermons and exhortations of which I have heard so many, and the inspirations of the Holy Ghost that have been so liberally bestowed on me? To-day is the twentieth, thirtieth, fortieth, fiftieth time for me to celebrate the feast of Pentecost, and to pray and sing with the Catholic Church, "Come, Holy Ghost." During that time, have I remained firm and constant in the state of grace? Have I put off the old and put on the new man? Have I since my last confession experienced a marked amendment in my former bad habits? My pride used to be so great that I was unwilling to make any concession to others; have I now become more meek and humble? I was careless of my salvation, and my sole concern was to make money; has that eagerness for the world now grown less? Formerly my unmortified flesh led me into indulging in many impure thoughts and desires; in unchaste looks, touches, words and songs; in dangerous love and friendship with persons of the other sex; have I now become more pure? Have I given up associating with that person? Have I abandoned the proximate occasion of sin? Have I kept away from that house, that place, in which I used to sin

before? Formerly I was in the habit of indulging in the devil's language, swearing and cursing: have I corrected that bad habit? Formerly, through curiosity, or imprudence, or talkativeness, or envy, or want of charity, I was given to talk about all that I had seen or heard of others, whereby I frequently sinned against charity and injured my neighbor's reputation; have I now become more careful in that respect? Formerly I was addicted to excessive drinking, which caused much unhappiness in my family, ruined my temporal prospects, and led me into many other sins; have I now become more temperate? Am I firmly resolved to live in a more Christian manner in future? I used to give scandal to many by my conversation, manners, and dress, and led many a soul from God to the slavery of the devil; do I now lead a more edifying life? Is the stumbling-block removed out of the way? Formerly I was so sensitive that I could not bear the least word of contradiction, and murmured and complained at the least trial or annoyance; am I now more patient and more resigned to the will of God? I used to allow every freedom to my eyes, ears, and other senses, and in all things I sought my pleasure and comfort; have I now a greater love for the cross and Christian mortification? In a word, has my life become changed for the better? If so, then indeed the Spirit of God has come to me, and my soul is now the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost, who has wrought this change in me.

But if, on the other hand, things remain in the old state; if I bring the same sins from one confession to another; if I am just as vain, impatient, unchaste, talkative, sensual, avaricious, tepid in the divine service as before; in the same proximate occasion and dangerous intimacy as before; in the same habit of cursing and swearing, the same hatred and discord, the same drunkenness as before, alas, then the Holy Ghost is still far from me! He has not yet come to me, or rather I have shut the door against him and have refused to receive him; so that it is another spirit, a wicked one, the vain spirit of the world, the unchaste spirit of the flesh, some unruly spirit of hell that has taken up his dwelling

in my heart. I will, then, do sincere penance, and drive that spirit away, and sigh forth to Heaven: "Come, Holy Ghost!" The door of my heart is open; fulfil in me the words thou didst speak to Saul: "The Spirit of the Lord shall come upon thee, and thou shalt be changed into another man." But it is not enough for the Holy Ghost to come into my soul; for what better should I be if he were to depart from me again? What must I do, then, that the words may be verified in me, "We will come to him, and will make our abode with him"? What am I to do that the Holy Ghost may remain with me constantly and dwell within me?

II. We mortals are wandering along a dangerous road to a long eternity, and if we are not very careful, we may easily fall, or go astray in a thousand false paths which lead to eternal ruin, and, as far as the knowledge of the soul is concerned, we are travelling in the dark, unless a light shines on us from above. The Holy Ghost is this light, for the Catholic Church sings of him "Come, light of our hearts!" Happy he who is provided with this light! As long as it shines on him, he is certain of being on the right road to heaven. But he must be careful that it is not extinguished. "Extinguish not the spirit," as the Apostle warns us (1. Thess. 5 : 19). If you have received the Spirit of God, be careful not to lose him. Hear what St. John Chrysostom says: "The Spirit is extinguished like a light, if you do not shut the door." By the door he means our outward senses, especially *the eyes* and *ears*, by which the greatest number of sins find an entry into our hearts, the divine light of the Holy Ghost is extinguished, and he himself is driven out of the soul.

Christian, you have now, as I suppose, confessed your sins with true supernatural sorrow; you come down through the church from the table of the Lord filled with the Spirit of God and with devotion, zeal, and splendid resolutions for the future, fully determined to devote yourself henceforth to the service of God. I see, as it were, your holy guardian angel at your right side, calling out with joy to the other Angels the words of the Gospel, in which

the divine Shepherd rejoices at having found the lost sheep: "Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost" (Luke 15 : 6). See how beautiful your soul is, adorned as it is with the snow-white wedding-garment of sanctifying grace, with the precious garb of immortality, with the royal colors of the children of God! The Angels look on you as their brother; heaven sees in you its heir and sovereign; God, your heavenly Father, regards you as his child; the Holy Ghost, as his bride, newly adorned and beautified. I congratulate you with all my heart! But you must go out of the church again. To-day or to-morrow you will go to that house or company in which, as you know from sad experience, you are apt to hear double-meaning words, or doubtful expressions that savor of impurity, expressions that should never be used amongst us, according to the warning of the Apostle: "All uncleanness . . . let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints: or obscenity, or foolish talking, or scurrility" (Ephes. 5 : 3, 4). Shut the door at once! Stop your ears! The Spirit of God, who is now dwelling in you, will be blown out like a light, if you do not shut the door, that is, your ears; your devotion will grow cold; your good resolutions will be forgotten; you will begin little by little to laugh at that sinful conversation and to take an inward pleasure in it, and so your light will be blown out again. To-day or to-morrow you will meet with those companions against whom you are warned: "My son, if sinners shall entice thee, consent not to them; . . . walk not thou with them, restrain thy foot from their paths. For their feet run to evil" (Prov. 1 : 10, 15, 16). Your former comrades will laugh at you, if you refuse to join them as you did formerly; they will invite you, and do all they can to make you accompany them to that gaming or drinking house, where you know by experience that your innocence is apt to suffer harm. Shut the door at once! Close your ears! "Hedge in thy ears with thorns, hear not a wicked tongue" (Ecclus. 28 : 28). The blandishments of such companions are false syrens' songs, that are intended to lure your soul on to the quicksands. The Holy

Ghost will be driven out of your soul like a candle that is blown out, if you do not close your ears on such occasions, and persevere with constancy on the way in which you have commenced to walk. To-day or to-morrow you will meet with friends who will flatter and try to cajole you with sweet words and a pleasing demeanor; away from them at once! Keep the door of your heart tightly closed; nay, avoid the house in which you meet with such people as you would a pestilence; otherwise the light of the Holy Ghost that is in your soul will be completely extinguished.

But if the ears are so dangerous on such occasions, how much more dangerous are not the eyes, if they are not strictly watched! The devil is well aware that the most dangerous doors for us are the eyes, and therefore he tries in every way to excite our curiosity, that he may thus succeed in pouring his deadly poison into our hearts and in blowing out the divine light of the Holy Ghost. Christian soul, you are now full of this light; be careful of it! Many a pleasing object will be offered to your eyes; you will be tempted by the beauty of others, by impure pictures and love tales. Turn away your eyes at once, or else you will lose the light of grace! O eyes, murderers of the soul! when you are too curious, what a beautiful light you put out! If the whole mischief consisted in the mere fact of looking at a beautiful object, such looks would be harmless and no injury could result to the soul; but "the thought follows the look, pleasure the thought, and consent the pleasure."

The reason of this is evident; for the image of a pleasing object is a sort of enchantment, that offers a kind of sweet violence to the will. Show to the man you wish to bribe a handful of gold; there, you say, that is yours, if you do this or that for me; and he will easily allow himself to be persuaded to accede to your wishes, and that, too, frequently against his conscience. On the other hand, say to him: I will prove my gratitude to you hereafter; I will give you a handful of gold as a reward; you will not influence him half so much, because he looks on your hereafter as an uncer-

tainty. This enchantment the devil ventured to use even against the Son of God, in order, as he hoped, to induce him to sin. "He took our Lord to the top of a high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory. See, he exclaimed, see those beautiful landscapes, those wide kingdoms, those beautiful meadows and gardens, those magnificent towns and cities; all this I will give thee, if thou wilt only bend the knee before me" (Matt. 4 : 8). But why did he show the kingdoms and goods of this world to our Lord? Could he not have described them to him in detail, and expatiated on their value and beauty? But the crafty spirit knew well the difference there is between having a mere knowledge with the understanding of an agreeable object and seeing it before one's eyes. For the beauty that one sees is already half coveted.

Even the most brilliant lights of heaven have been extinguished in that way; I mean, the holiest souls have been led into sin by an unguarded look. *Eve*, who was created in the state of sanctifying grace and full of the Holy Ghost, cast a glance on the forbidden fruit: "And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold." Oh, the hellish serpent had already attained his object! "And she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" (Gen. 3 : 6). *David*, a man after God's own heart, chanced to see at a distance, from the windows of his palace, the beauty of Bethsabee, and at once all his light, his holiness, and his fear of God left him. *The elders of the Jewish people* looked at Susanna, and the light of God became extinguished in their hearts. O eyes, I repeat, murderers of souls! when you are too curious, what a beautiful light you put out! With reason did the prophet Jeremias exclaim: "My eye hath wasted my soul" (Lam. 3 : 51). Supposing even that the sight of another's beauty does not at once cause you to indulge in an unlawful desire, do you think that the image which has once filled your imagination will so soon be expelled from it? By no means. The devil will know how to excite it again, either when you are alone, or in the stillness of the night, or even in church and when you are at your prayers.

I refer you to your own experience in corroboration of this. From what other source do the most common and most violent temptations that assail the imagination come, if not from some object that, often quite unforeseen, presents itself to our gaze? And how much more are not such temptations to be looked for, when we deliberately fix our eyes on such objects? Impure thoughts and desires are only too apt to come of themselves without provocation, and to buzz around us like flies; twenty times we drive them away, and twenty times they come back again. What will it be when we open the door wide to them, and allow them to enter freely by our eyes? Ah, for God's sake, let us not open the gate to our enemy, nor wilfully admit the seed of wickedness!

I cannot make a better conclusion than in the words which St. Paul addresses to the Thessalonians: "All you are the children of light, and children of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness"(1. Thess. 5: 5). Dear souls, filled with the Holy Ghost, whom you have received after a worthy confession and Communion, you are now completely renewed! Children of light, you are inflamed with the fire of the love of God; rejoice in the Lord and bless the Father of light; but be careful in future! "Extinguish not the spirit;" do not put out that beautiful light! Keep fast closed the doors of your senses, especially your eyes and ears, that the dangerous wind may not enter; fly carefully all the occasions in which you know by experience you are apt to fall; "and may the God of peace himself sanctify you in all things, that your whole spirit, and soul, and body may be preserved blameless in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"(1. Thess. 5: 23). Amen.

TRINITY SUNDAY.
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE HOLINESS OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

"*Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.*" *Matt.* 18 : 20.

What a comfort and happiness for all true Catholics to hear from the lips of Jesus the assurance: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world," by my real presence on the altar as a victim constantly offered to me and your heavenly Father in the holy Mass, an infinitely holy sacrifice, by which you can give him infinite honor, infinite thanks for all his benefits, infinite atonement and satisfaction for all your offences, and obtain from him most effectually all imaginable graces. On this real presence of Jesus Christ in the holy Mass I shall speak in this and the following four sermons. It is a most useful and consoling subject for all men, whether they are sinners or just. For the sacrifice of the Mass is a most holy sacrifice.

I. Most holy on account of the priest who offers it:
II. Most holy on account of the victim offered.

What a magnificent temple Solomon had to build for the sole purpose of sacrificing to God in a becoming manner! It was by its size and the art displayed in its construction a wonder of the world, an immense treasure-chamber by reason of the wealth of silver and gold vessels, censers, and countless articles of the kind that were used in sacrifice. And how costly the vestments the priests had to put on before officiating! Some of the books of the Old Testament are half full of the laws relating to the ceremonies and to the different usages intended to foster devotion which had, by command of God, to be observed most exactly before, during, and after the sacrifice. Holy Writ itself testifies to the devotion

and reverential awe with which the people assisted at those rites. When Solomon caused the priests to offer many sacrifices, "all the children of Israel saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord upon the house ; and falling down with their faces to the ground, they adored and praised the Lord. And the priests stood in their offices, and the Levites with the instruments of music of the Lord" (Paral. 7: 3, 6). When Pompey took Jerusalem, he could not sufficiently express his astonishment at the devotion and reverence with which the Jews assisted at their sacrifices: God himself often showed in a miraculous manner how pleasing those sacrifices were to him. When Solomon brought the ark into the temple, there were so many victims offered that they could not be counted. And the Lord showed how pleased he was, for his glory filled the temple like a bright cloud, in which he permitted a visible ray of his divine splendor to appear. The same Solomon in his youth offered a thousand head of cattle on one day as a holocaust, and the following night the Lord gave him in a vision that wisdom which made him celebrated over the whole world. When the people of Israel had assembled in Masphat, and knew not what to do to defend themselves against the mighty army the Philistines had brought to attack them, they fled to Samuel, who at once offered sacrifice, and the result was that God so frightened the enemy by thunders and lightnings, that they took to flight, and a few of the Israelites followed and utterly routed them.

And what were those ancient sacrifices, after all? "Weak and needy elements" (Gal. 4: 9). They were mere shadows and figures of the holy Mass: "Now all these things happened to them in figure" (1. Cor. 10: 11). As a magnificent building surpasses the mere sketch made of it on paper, so, too, nay, infinitely more excellent, is the holy Mass compared to all the sacrifices of the Old Law put together. How and why? Consider the priest who *then* offered, and him who *now* offers, and you will see that there is an infinite distance between the holiness of the two sacrifices.

The chief priests *in the law of nature* were Noe, Abraham,

Isaac, Jacob, Melchisedech ; and *in the written law of Moses,* Aaron, Heli, Samuel, Mathias and many others. They were the holiest and best of their priests. But holy and good as they were, they were only mere creatures, poor, miserable, weak, sinful men, inclined to evil, who, if they could have offered all the treasures of the world as a holocaust to God, would not even then have offered him anything suitable to his majesty, on account of the person from whom the gift would come. God was indeed satisfied with those sacrifices at that time, for he knew that they had nothing better to give him, and he received them with pleasure from the hands of the priests, but only because they were figures and shadows of that Priest from whom he was afterwards to receive the true and perfect sacrifice. We Catholics are now living in those desirable times which Jesus announced to the Samaritan woman at the well : "The hour cometh and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4 : 23), and not as formerly, in figures and shadows. For now for the last eighteen, almost nineteen hundred years an infinitely holy Priest has been offering to the God of infinite holiness an infinitely holy sacrifice, which is the Mass, that is daily said on the altars in our churches.

But you will ask, are not our priests who say Mass men too ? By all means ! But you must not look at them on the altar as if they were the only persons offering the sacrifice. No, they are, so to speak, but the poor laborers who perform the outward ceremonies, the plenipotentiaries who stand there in the name of their great Sovereign, to furnish the outward signs and pronounce the words of consecration with their lips. Standing beside them there is another invisible Priest, whose person they represent, and who is the principal offerer, who makes use of them as mere instruments, and of whom David says : "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech" (Ps. 109: 4). He is the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ himself, who not only filled his priestly office on the cross, when he offered and sacrificed himself in a bloody manner to his Father for the salvation of the world, but now contin-

ues to offer himself until the end of the world and to fill the same office of priest in an unbloody manner on our altars. The Council of Trent has published the following decree as an article of faith: "*The same who offered himself on the cross now offers himself by the ministry of the priest.*"

If Jesus Christ were not the chief priest on the occasion, the words of the consecration, in which the substance of the sacrifice consists, would be false and untrue. For, what are those words? "This is my body; this is the chalice of my Blood." If I pronounce those words at the altar, what do I mean by them? Do I wish to say, this is my own body, my own blood? By no means; for it is clear enough that the bread is not changed into my body, nor the wine into my blood; it must be, then, that these words refer to the body and blood of Christ; and therefore, since the priest does not say: This is the body of Christ, the blood of Christ, but: This is my body, this is my blood, it is beyond a doubt that the priest is not speaking in his own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ. No mere creature can by his own power change bread and wine into the substance of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that what was before bread and wine becomes after the words of consecration, and still retaining the outward appearances as before, the body and blood of the Lord, the former substance of the bread and wine having completely disappeared. "This is not the work of human power." We priests are but the servants; He is the Lord and Master. We hold the place of ministers; he it is who consecrates and changes. When you see the priest beginning to utter the wonderful words of consecration, imagine you hear the powerful voice of the Lord himself, who by the breath of his mouth commanded all things to be made out of nothing, and they were made; and who at the word of the priest, his servant, orders the destruction of the whole substance of bread and wine, and at the same time enters into the accidents, invisible to our eyes, but visible to our faith, and remains there.

From this it follows, my dear brethren, that the Mass is always good, always holy, always pleasing to God, always of the same

merit and value, no matter who the human priest is who says it; for whether he is pious or wicked, a friend or an enemy of God, in the state of grace or the state of sin, that does not touch the essential part of the sacrifice; the piety of the priest does not make its substance and essence holier in itself; nor can the wickedness of the priest, provided he has the right intention, detract in the least from its holiness and dignity; just as the wickedness of the servant does not lessen the merit and value of the generous alms which a good master gives to the poor, through Christian charity and mercy, by the hands of that servant. Why so? Because the giver of the alms is not the godless servant, but the pious master. In the same way, too, the chief priest in the holy Mass is not the man who stands at the altar, but Jesus Christ Himself, the Holy of holies.

Every gift must bear some proportion to the high position of him who gives it, and also to the dignity of the person to whom it is presented. A penny is a suitable offering for a poor man, but not so for a prince. A gold piece is a suitable gift for a king to bestow, if it is given to a poor man; but not so if it is to be offered to another king. What were the victims of the Old Law? Pigeons and turtle-doves, oxen and calves, sheep and lambs, rams and goats; that was all. Oh, what a poor present to offer the great God! Yet those things bore some proportion to the poverty of the priests of those days, who, being mere mortals, had nothing better to offer. Now it is God, Jesus Christ Himself, who offers. Therefore, that the gift might be proportioned to the infinite God who offers and the infinite God who receives, it must also be in itself of infinite value and excellence.

Such is the case with what is offered in the holy Mass. The gift that Jesus Christ presents to his Eternal Father is the life of a God; it is he himself, in all his infinite greatness, with his divinity and humanity, his body and soul, his flesh and blood—that immaculate lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, of whom St. Andrew said to the tyrant who tried to make him sacrifice to false gods: "I sacrifice daily to the Almighty

God on the altar the unspotted Lamb, whose flesh all the faithful people present eat, and yet the Lamb that was sacrificed still remains whole and living."

To understand this better, we must know that the holy Mass is still the same sacrifice that Jesus Christ offered on the cross; such is the express teaching of the Council of Trent: "One and the same is the victim, one and the same the offerer, by the ministry of the priest, who offered himself on the cross, the only difference being in the manner of offering. As often as the commemoration of this victim is celebrated, the work of our Redemption is being performed," not otherwise than if the Son of God again shed his blood and lost his life for us on the cross; with this sole difference, that on the cross he really shed his blood and lost his life, but in the holy Mass he does this morally and mystically. The love of Jesus Christ for his Eternal Father, and for us, too, is indeed so great that, if necessary, he would hang on the cross until the end of the world in his own person, so that he might always offer himself for the service of the divine majesty and for our reconciliation with God. But as this would hinder the glory that is due to his adorable body, and, moreover, as it is not suitable that such a terrible, murderous spectacle which the Jews perpetrated on our Lord should continue so long on earth, therefore, by the institution of the holy Mass, he has found a wonderful means of being in glory in heaven and at the same time, without actually shedding his blood, of always suffering and dying. How is that?

Just as on the cross the blood was really separated from the body of Christ, so it is also separated at the consecration in the Mass. For by virtue of the words of consecration, "this is my body; this is my blood," under the appearance of bread there is only the body, and under the appearance of wine only the blood of Christ, although both are united under either appearance, since Christ cannot any more really die. Just as the body of Christ hung lifeless on the cross, so the same body is in the accidents as if he had not life, since it appears to be lifeless food and drink. And just as Christ remained attached to the cross until his sacri-

fice was consummated, so he remains under the accidents of bread and wine until they are consumed. Thus our Lord has become an everlasting sacrifice, which, according to his prediction, will be always offered upon our altars to the Eternal Father till the end of the world.

Thus the holy Mass is an infinitely holy sacrifice, because the priest who offers it is the infinite God, and the victim offered is the same infinite God. From this it follows that we have nothing holier, higher, worthier, more perfect to present to God than this divine sacrifice. Prayer, fasting, alms giving, watching, penance and bodily mortification, and all imaginable works of piety that man can perform; praises, blessings, thanksgivings, and all the acts of love of the Angels and blessed in heaven, cannot approach this in worth and excellence! A single Mass is of more value in the sight of God than all other acts put together. Why? Because they are and remain the acts of creatures, but the holy Mass is the work of God; nay, it is God himself.

And is it possible that, as long as we are in good health, we can allow a single day to pass by without assisting at this divine sacrifice? If there were only one place in the world in which our Lord would descend in visible form once in the year, and again hang on the cross as he did on Calvary, to offer himself to his Eternal Father for all present, and to give them countless graces and blessings, what a concourse of Christians there would be to that place, in spite of distance, from all parts of the world! What innumerable pilgrimages would be made to it! I believe that the whole Catholic world would assemble there to assist at the divine sacrifice with the utmost devotion, modesty of behavior, reverence, and humility. Is not that so? Ah, how great is our good fortune! Not merely in one place alone, and that at a distance from us, but in all the churches in this town, which are but a few steps from our doors; not merely once a year, but every day, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offers himself up for us, although not so that the eyes of the body can see him, yet he is visible enough to the eyes of faith. Thus daily, hourly, he renews on

our altars in a mystic manner his sufferings and death on the cross. Daily, hourly, if we wish to take the trouble of going a few steps, we can have our share of the great treasure of graces that he then so liberally distributes. What is the matter with us, Christians? What ails us? Shall we always continue so slothful, tepid, and sunk in earthly things, that we do not care to assist at this holy sacrifice even once in the week?

Or, if we do hear Mass once a week as I hope all good Catholics do, is it possible that we do not display the greatest devotion, love, fervor, humility, and reverence? We have already seen that the Jews in the Old Law were most reverent when offering their sacrifices, which consisted of nothing better than sheep, oxen, and goats immolated by a sinful mortal. How should we not, then, behave at this sacrifice, in which the great God offers, and the great God is himself offered? Truly, we are not worthy of being present at such mysteries if we do not feel a shudder of holy awe at the entrance of the church, or at least the beginning of the Mass. Faith, where art thou? If thou didst shine with all thy light in our hearts, we should imagine, when we are entering the church to hear Mass, that we are being led into heaven, before the throne of Jesus Christ; and at the words of consecration we should think that heaven was ravished out of itself with admiration, while hell trembles with fear because the Son of God is immolated to his Eternal Father. During the whole Mass we should think we see Angels descending from heaven in visible human form, barefooted, with downcast eyes and folded hands standing round the altar, and at the consecration prostrating themselves on the ground to adore their Lord, and maintaining that humble posture till the end of Mass.

And we poor worms of the earth, how do we assist at such an infinitely holy mystery? Ah, I am ashamed when I think of it. I can often hardly bear to look at the bad behavior of some Catholics at Mass. To hear Mass on bended knees, with downcast eyes, folded hands, meditating on the holy mysteries or praying orally: oh, that is well enough for the common people; but it would be a

mortal sin against the present usages of the world; it would be a most unbecoming thing for a gentleman or lady who has seen the world. So sit down in an easy posture, with the hands in the breast of your coat; or to stand with your hands in your pockets, idly staring around you, bowing to those who come in and go out; to gaze at another's beauty, and thus often stain your souls with sinful desires; to laugh and talk, and, if there is that much piety left, to bend one knee at the consecration, but without attention, devotion, or reverence—that is the way to hear Mass now a-days, according to the fashion of the world.

Hear, all you who forget the proper modesty, reverence, devotion, and attention during Mass! either you believe what the faith infallibly assures us of with regard to the sacrifice of our religion, or you do not believe it. Whatever answer you make to this, you are still inexcusable. For, if you believe that in the holy Mass the great God is present offering, and the great God is present as the victim offered, then you are more shameless and in a certain sense more wicked than the Jews and heretics. They crucified our Lord, and mocked him as he hung on the cross, but they did so through ignorance, not knowing that Christ was God. The heretics often pillaged the tabernacle and trampled the sacred Host under foot; but they did that because they denied the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. But you Catholics, by your misconduct and bad behavior, mock and turn into ridicule even that very God whom you know to be present. If, on the other hand, you are wanting faith; if you do not believe that Jesus Christ is the priest and the victim in the Mass, then why do you come to church to be present with us at this sacrifice? You are guilty of idolatry; for you wish to be looked on as adoring the Lord God in the Mass, although you do not believe in your hearts in what you are doing outwardly. What shall I say to you then? Shall I tell you to remain away from the church, to separate yourselves from the communion of the faithful, to give up hearing Mass? No, my dear Christians! far different shall our conclusion be. We will hear Mass but we shall always assist at it with due respect, with

profound humility and modesty in our outward and inward demeanor, with minds recollected in God, and with outward attention, uniting our prayers with all possible devotion with the prayer of Jesus Christ, and offering up our life and death in union with his.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE HONOR GIVEN TO GOD IN THE HOLY MASS.

"A certain man made a great supper." Luke 14 : 16.

By this man is understood Jesus Christ, our Saviour ; the great supper which he prepares for the faithful is his own flesh and blood, which are placed on the altar in the holy Mass as a victim, and at the same time as food and drink. I showed in the last sermon that this is an infinitely holy sacrifice, in which the priest is God himself, and the victim God himself. I now continue and say—

In the holy sacrifice of the Mass an infinite honor is given to God.

The greater and more excellent a lord is, the greater the honor that must be paid him, and this honor has to bear proportion to the dignity and majesty of him to whom it is given, or else it will not be pleasing in his sight. Since, then, God is an infinitely great lord, who has in himself infinite perfections in an infinite degree, it follows that a similar, that is, an infinite honor, is due to him. But where can we find on earth a gift that is suitable for that infinite Lord ? What sacrifice can we offer him that will render him infinite honor ? In the Old Law there was certainly nothing of the kind, even if all the sacrifices they then had were all heaped up together. Why ? Because in all their circumstances they were too vile and unworthy. The priests who offered were poor, miserable mortals, subject to sins and vices ; the victims were only sheep, oxen, goats ; the manner of offering was to slay those animals and burn them. There was nothing in all this that bore any resemblance

to the infinite majesty of God, and therefore it is no wonder that God sometimes felt but little pleasure in such sacrifices and so often rejected them.

Thus, in order to give that great Lord the honor due to him, it was necessary that God should remain on the throne of his glory to receive the sacrifice, and at the same time descend on our altars to offer it. The same God, too, had to be the person who offered himself with the utmost humility and reverence before the divine Majesty, since it is God to whom the offering was to be made. In this way alone God is honored as becomes his dignity and majesty. For he who offers is the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, true God of true God, the object of the infinite, eternal love of the Father; he who is equal to the Father in all things. He it is who offers sacrifice to the Father, of whom the Father said: "This is my beloved Son,in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 17: 5). What an honor it is to receive a sacrifice from such a Son! And what does he offer? Not the dead, perishable flesh of a lamb, or an ox, or any other animal, of which the ancient sacrifices consisted, but his own flesh and blood; his holy, living, and vivifying flesh, that stainless flesh which he received in the holy and immaculate womb of the Virgin Mary, which the power of the Holy Ghost united to the divine nature and made to exist with it in the Person of the Eternal Word. In a word, his offering is himself in all his greatness and immensity. Could the Lord God receive any greater honor outside himself, than what he has in such a sacrifice?

Finally, in what manner is that sacrifice offered? The marks of respect that we men give each other generally contain some act of humiliation; for instance, we uncover the head, bow it down, bend the body, and, according to the dignity of the person, bend the knee to show our respect. But it is the almighty God who in a special manner can and will be honored by his creatures only by humiliation. Therefore, in the holocausts of the Old Law, which were for the sole object of honoring God, the victim was thrown into the fire and burnt to ashes and as it were annihilated, whereby those who offered testified to God that they were as noth-

ing in his sight, and that they were ready to give up all they had, even their lives, for his honor and glory, just as the victim was destroyed instead of them in the fire. Judge now of the immense honor and glory that the Son of God daily renders his Eternal Father in the holy Mass, inasmuch as he makes of himself as it were a holocaust and burnt-offering, with a humiliation which cannot be more profound. For this King of glory condescends to come down on the altar at the word of a poor mortal, and to place himself in the hands of the priest, although the latter may be the most wicked of men. What a humiliation for the same God to hide himself under the lowly appearances of bread and wine, so that not the least ray of his divinity, humanity, glory, or majesty is seen! What an annihilation it is for him to shut himself up in the narrow compass of the sacramental species, so that he has placed his human body in each particle of the consecrated Host in such a position that it cannot exercise any of its senses in a natural manner! What a humiliation it is for him thus to renew daily his Passion and death, and to place himself in the condition of the death which he suffered for us on Calvary! What an annihilation for him to become our food and drink, to be eaten and drunk by the priest and others who receive holy Communion, and thus to lose the sacramental life he received in the consecration; nay, he would even lose his natural life thereby, if that were not now immortal and preserved by a miracle! What a humiliation for him to put on the appearance of a sinner, who acknowledges by the act of sacrifice that he deserves to be deprived of life and to be annihilated!

Hence, whenever holy Mass is celebrated, the Almighty receives an infinite honor, such as all the creatures of the whole world could not give him through all eternity. Imagine that the Almighty creates, as he can do, millions of the most beautiful heavens, and fills them all with Seraphim, who for all eternity shall praise, love, and honor their Creator with the greatest zeal and fervor; that he creates, moreover, countless worlds, all inhabited by men who for many hundred thousand years serve him with

the holiness of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and that at last all those holy men are slain in his honor and offered to him as burnt-offerings; what inconceivable honor would thus be rendered to God! And yet it is all a mere nothing compared to what is rendered him in the holy Mass. A single Mass gives God more honor than all I have said, and he has more pleasure in it than in all the homage that all possible creatures can ever give him; because in every Mass *a God offers*, and *a God is offered*, and that, too, with the utmost humiliation and self-abasement. God himself prophesied this by Malachias: "I will not receive a gift of your hand. For from the rising of the sun, even to the going down, my name is great among the Gentiles." Why? "And in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to my name a clean offering" (Mal. 1: 10, 11).

It seems to me now, my dear brethren, that you will perhaps feel a secret envy towards us priests, since we have the great privilege, in preference to all others who are not priests, of offering daily at the altar that most holy sacrifice by which God is honored in a special manner, which you, with all your prayers and good works, cannot approach. True, but be satisfied and contented; you share in our happiness; Jesus Christ did not wish to be the only one to pay infinite honor to the Blessed Trinity; for he has instituted the Mass as a sacrifice in which all Catholics can share; in it, namely, he gives himself to all the faithful in general, and to each one in particular, so that each and every one present may offer him to the Eternal Father. The sacrifice is offered not by the priest alone who says Mass and represents the person of Christ, the High-Priest, but by all those who, being united with Christ as his members, hear Mass with devotion and offer it to God. The only difference between you and us is that we priests have the power of changing bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, a power that lay people have not. But when the body and blood of Christ are thus present on the altar, all Christians of both sexes who are present can offer him with all his infinite merits to God, in union with the priest, nay, with the Son of God

himself. Such is the meaning of the honorable titles given by St. Peter to all Christians: "But you are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people; that you may declare his virtues, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1. Pet. 2 : 9). The same appears still more clearly from the prayers which the priest says on the altar during Mass in the name of all those present. "We offer to thee, O Lord," he says: and, "receive, O Most Holy Trinity, this offering we present to thee." When he turns to the people, saying, "Pray, brethren," he continues in silence, "that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Father Almighty." After having prayed for the absent, that they, too, may receive the fruit of the holy sacrifice, he adds, "and all those present who offer thee this sacrifice of praise." Immediately after the consecration he says: "We, thy servants, and thy holy people, offer thee a pure host, a holy host, an immaculate host, the holy bread of eternal life, and the chalice of everlasting salvation." There is, then, no doubt that all the faithful present who hear Mass devoutly in union with Jesus Christ, their Head, whose members they are, offer that holy sacrifice with the priest, and consequently give their heavenly Father the same honor that Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son, gives him, that is, an infinite honor.

What an exceeding great happiness that is for you Catholics! Have you ever really thought of this before? Have you ever reflected, when hearing Mass, that you thus offer Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to the Eternal Father, in order to give him the honor due to him? O Christians, remember this with a lively faith whenever you enter the church to hear Mass; then you shall learn to appreciate better than you have hitherto done this most august sacrifice; then shall you be determined not to allow a day to pass, as long as you are in good health, without assisting at this mysterious sacrifice, and that, too, with all possible devotion, with constant attention and the utmost reverence.

For you can easily see from what has been said what a grievous insult they offer the Lord who in any way wilfully misbehave in

the church during Mass. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offers himself for us on the altar to his Eternal Father, and thereby honors him with an infinite honor; we are there for no other purpose than to offer the same sacrifice with Jesus Christ, and the same infinite honor to his Eternal Father; and should we, then, give our Lord occasion to make the same reproach to us that he made to the envious and wicked Pharisees: "I honor my Father, and you have dishonored me?" (John 8: 49.) Far be such wickedness from all of us who are here present! If we have hitherto been wanting in this respect, we humbly acknowledge our fault and repent of it with our whole hearts. With the help of thy grace, O God, we shall do better in future, and we shall come before thee with more devotion humility and respect, so that, when we hear holy Mass, we may be able to say with thy divine Son, our Lord and Saviour, I, too, give my heavenly Father due and infinite honor. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MASS AS A SACRIFICE OF ATONEMENT.

"*This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.*" *Luke* 15 : 2.

Woe to us if Jesus were not here to receive sinners and eat with them! But he does that daily, to the great comfort of all sinners, when he offers himself as a sacrifice of atonement in the Mass to appease the anger of his heavenly Father against the sins of the world, and gives himself to repentant sinners who return to him as the food of their souls. And this, my dear brethren, is the first advantage we derive from the wonderful and infinitely holy sacrifice of the Mass; namely:—

The holy Mass is a sacrifice of infinite atonement, which appeases the anger of God, so that he does not vent it against sinners.

Sin is so hateful to God that he would at once damn the sinner, if there were no one to appease his anger. Hence the Old Law

had many sacrifices of atonement, which however, had not the power of offering adequate atonement.

The angry God, in order to be fully reconciled to us, requires a full atonement for the insult offered him by sin, a complete restitution of his injured honor ; and no mere creature can give him that. If all the Angels and elect in heaven, and the holiest men on earth, countless in number, were to offer themselves to God to undergo the most cruel torments for millions of years, and to sacrifice to him their lives in the midst of such long-continued torments, nay, along with that, to burn forever in hell—all that would not have the least effect in atoning for one mortal sin to the divine justice. For, on one side, the meaner and viler the person who offends, and the greater and higher the person who is offended, the greater also is the malice of the offence and the insult, and, of course, the greater the atonement required to wipe it out. And on the other side, the higher and greater the person to whom satisfaction is to be made, and the meaner and viler the person who has to make it, the meaner and viler, too, is the satisfaction itself. Now, since the infinite majesty of God is offended and insulted by a miserable creature, the wickedness of sin and the injury it offers to God are in a certain sense infinite, and require an infinite atonement. And since all the services that all mere creatures can offer to God are almost infinitely worthless, so the atonement rendered by such services is infinitely inadequate, and therefore it is not possible for a mere creature to satisfy God fully for even one mortal sin and restore his injured honor. Therefore the man who undertakes to render this satisfaction must be God as well, that, as man, he may be burdened with the load of sin by which God is insulted and offended, appear before the same God, and offer his atonement ; while, as he is also God, he lends to this act an infinite value and satisfying power.

This is what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has fully accomplished in taking on himself human nature "Wherefore, when he cometh into the world he saith : Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not ; but a body thou hast fitted to me. Then said I, be-

hold, I come, that I should do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10: 5,7). What Christ thus said to his heavenly Father in the first moment of his life he afterwards fulfilled on the cross, inasmuch as he completed the sacrifice by shedding his blood and suffering a shameful death ; and so he has offered to God an infinite atonement for the sins of an infinite number of creatures, if such a number were possible ; he has completely restored the injured honor of God, appeased his anger, and brought about a full reconciliation between God and man.

Now that same sacrifice that was then offered *in a bloody manner* for the salvation of the world on the cross is still offered on our altars *in an unbloody manner* in the Mass. The same unspotted Lamb, Jesus Christ, now offers his sacred flesh and blood to his heavenly Father for the sins of the world, as he did then ; the same death of the cross is now renewed in a mystic manner as often as the priest says Mass ; and hence the same complete atonement for sin is offered to the angry God every day. Such is the express teaching of the Council of Trent : "The Council teaches that this sacrifice is truly propitiatory" (Trid. Sess. 22 : 2). For Jesus our Saviour, foresaw the many grievous sins and abominations that even Christians would commit till the end of the world, thus daily, nay, hourly, drawing down the anger of God on the world ; and consequently his unheard-of love was not satisfied with merely offering himself once on the cross, but he instituted this mystery that we might offer him daily, hourly, nay, every moment almost, as an atonement to appease the anger of God. And in reality hardly a moment passes in which in some part or other of the world bread and wine are not changed into his body and blood by a priest, nay, by many priests, and thus the holy sacrifice is consummated. For the sun that in its course makes evening in one part of the world brings on the morning at the same time in another ; when it is dark night here, it is daylight elsewhere ; and those hours which are in the middle of our night are elsewhere the hours of noontide ; so that wherever it is forenoon Mass is said, and thus at all hours and moments Mass is said, nay, many Masses, in some part or other of the globe.

In the Mass we have a most powerful means of appeasing the divine anger against sin, and averting from ourselves and those who belong to us well-merited chastisements that have been decreed against us. When the Patriarch Jacob heard that his brother Esau was coming, filled with rage, to meet him with a powerful army, he was at his wit's end to know what to do to escape the danger that threatened him and his family. At last a thought struck him: "I will appease him with the presents that go before, and afterwards I will see him; perhaps he will be gracious to me" (Gen. 32 : 20). The plan succeeded to perfection; for when Esau met Jacob, and was greeted by him with a lowly obeisance, "then," says the Scripture, "Esau ran to meet his brother and embraced him; and clasping him fast about the neck and kissing him, wept" (Gen. 23 : 4). Christians, who of us is there whose conscience does not reproach him with sin and transgressing the divine law? Ah, daily, hourly, we fall into sin only too much, and sometimes most grievously. Daily we call down on our heads the just wrath of God. Daily we deserve to suffer from his avenging justice all sorts of calamities. Let us, then, make the resolution of appeasing him with gifts, of regaining by presents the favor of the God whose wrath we have aroused. And what shall we give him? One present alone, but that the most costly and the most agreeable to him, namely, his own most beloved Son, the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, my Saviour, in the holy Mass.

Sinners, no matter how great and abominable your crimes, ah, let none of you despair of the mercy of God. Only come and hear Mass, and you can have the firmest hope of being reconciled with God, no matter how great his anger has been against you. If you have grievously offended God and brought down his just anger on you, so that you dare not appear before him on account of the multitude and deformity of your sins, hear holy Mass with devotion and reverence, and imagine that you hear Jesus saying to you from the altar what he once said from the crucifix to a despairing sinner: "Take me and give me for yourself." And not only

will he be thus induced to restrain anger against you, but you will also thereby be admitted to his full favor and friendship, and he will forgive a great part of the punishment due to your past sins. For with regard to the favor and friendship of God, you must know that in the present arrangement of divine Providence you cannot receive that unless in the Sacrament of Penance, or if you have no opportunity of receiving the Sacrament, by perfect contrition for your sins; thereby man can recover immediately the sanctifying grace and the friendship of God that he had lost by mortal sin. The power of the holy Mass does not extend to restoring sinners to the grace of God in that way. And how, then? The Council of Trent tells us in the following words: "The Lord, being appeased by this oblation, forgives even enormous sins." In what manner? "By giving the grace and gift of penance "(Trid., Sess. 22 : 2). If, then, Mass is said for a sinner, or he himself hears it with proper attention, reverence, and devotion, the good God gives him, in consideration of this infinitely valuable sacrifice of atonement, interior inspirations and illuminations by which he may see the unhappy state in which he is, the deformity and malice of his sins, and the great danger he is in of eternal damnation; and he moves his heart to resolve to free himself from that state at once by true penance. In the same way we read that many of those who witnessed the crucifixion of the Son of God were converted: "And all the multitude of them that were come together to that sight, and saw the things that were done, returned, striking their breasts" (Luke 23 : 48). Many repented of the horrible crime they had been guilty of towards the innocent Lord, begged pardon of God, and were converted with their whole hearts; a great grace that was given them in virtue of that infinite sacrifice. That it is which should be the greatest inducement for those who are in the state of sin to hear Mass. True it is that, while they are in that unhappy state, they cannot perform a single work, no matter how holy it is in itself, not even hearing Mass, which is meritorious of eternal life; nevertheless, since they are in the greatest need of the grace of conversion, and that grace is a great one, and the holy Mass is a

most powerful means of obtaining all graces, but especially that of repentance, because it is a sacrifice of atonement, and since, as I believe, many sinners will not receive this grace unless they hear Mass and thus obtain it—therefore, O sinners, do not remain away from the holy sacrifice. Nay, as long as you are in good health and have the opportunity, hear Mass, and say often with sorrow of heart, like the publican: O God, be merciful to me a sinner; O God, I implore of thee by the flesh and blood of thy Son, who is the infinite atonement and satisfaction for our sins, be merciful to me, a poor sinner!

Further, with regard to the punishment due to past sins (and this concerns just souls as well), amongst all good works, penances, and mortifications of the flesh, there is again no more powerful means of rendering ourselves partakers in the infinite satisfaction of the life and death of Jesus Christ, and of blotting out the punishment that still remains due to our sins, than the holy sacrifice of the Mass; for therein Christ himself renews his life and death, and offers them to his Father as an atonement for our sins. Hence, in my opinion, confessors can impose no better penance on their penitents, after the latter have repented and confessed, than the hearing of Mass in order to blot out the punishment still due to their sins. For the same reason there is nothing more profitable for the poor souls in purgatory than the holy Mass.

After all this, what am I to think of many Christians nowadays? I cannot understand how a man who is enlightened by the grace of faith, and who has committed many grievous sins that his conscience reproaches him with,—I cannot understand how such a man can allow a single day, much less a Sunday, to pass by without hearing Mass. Imagine that half an hour's walk from here is living a very rich man, who is willing to bestow gratis to all who come to him great sums of money. Now, there is a man in town notoriously involved in debt head and ears, but he will not take the trouble to go to that generous man, and prefers to remain idly at home with his arms folded, stand-

ing at the door. What would you think of him? Would you not be surprised at his extreme laziness and stupidity? Would you not say that it would serve him quite right if he and his family were to fall into the utmost poverty? Would you have any pity for him if his creditors were to throw him into the deepest dungeon, and there let him rot away? No, you think; it is his own fault; he has only himself to thank for it all. Now, my dear brethren, there is perhaps no one of us, when he considers the years of his past life, who must not acknowledge that he has contracted almost infinite debts with the divine Justice on account of his sins; and at the same time we are so wretchedly poor that we have nothing in our possession by which we can reduce that debt in the least. Meanwhile there is an infinitely rich Lord, who can and will supply us with an infinitely great sum to pay off our debts, and that, too, gratuitously; that Lord is Jesus Christ in the holy Mass, and he offers us therein the infinite merits of his bitter Passion and death to present to God, and thus wipe out our debts. To share in these merits, we need not undertake a journey of even half an hour; we have the opportunity in almost every street, and at our very doors; we need only go to church and hear Mass with attention and devotion. And shall we neglect that easy and beautiful means of paying our debts to God, for the sake of fooling away our time at home, or indulging in a longer sleep, or tricking ourselves out in the fashion, or making some trifling profit in our temporal affairs, which after all we may fail to make, because we have not the blessing of God, since we neglect to hear Mass? We often try to excuse ourselves, and say that we cannot attend to prayer and the meditation of divine things, on account of our own domestic cares; we cannot give alms on account of our own poverty; we cannot fast on account of the delicate state of our health; we cannot practise bodily mortifications to atone for our sins, because our health does not permit it. Very well! I am quite willing to believe that such is the case. But is it such a difficult thing to make ourselves partakers

of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ by hearing Mass, in order to pay the debts we have contracted with the divine Justice by our sins?

In future let us act more prudently, and every day, while we have health and the opportunity, hear Mass with due attention and devotion. Like poor criminals condemned to death and on our way to execution, laden with chains, let us present ourselves before the divine Majesty, and as a preparation say to God: Behold me here before thee, O God of justice, a poor sinner laden with debt, who have not a single farthing of my own to pay with; but "have patience with me, and I will pay thee all" (Matt. 18: 29); nay, I will give thee infinitely more than I owe thee. Behold, I offer thee the blood of thy dear Son! That is a treasure which is infinitely greater than all the debts that the sins of numberless worlds could contract. This payment thou canst not refuse; in this blood I sink my hitherto ungrateful, obstinate heart, as the poor widow in the Gospel cast her mite into the treasury. Thou canst take revenge on it; but I beg of thee, let it be a revenge of love and mercy. Cleanse it from all undue attachment to creatures; wound, cut, burn, and inflame it with the fire of thy divine love, that I may remain free from all sins in future, and love thee, my God, with my whole heart in time and eternity. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MASS AS A SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING.

"*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" *Luke* 5 : 8.

Strange, indeed, for Peter to say this. For my part, although I must acknowledge myself unworthy to be in the presence of Jesus Christ, yet the prayer I address to him is quite contrary to that, and I say: O Lord, remain with me; go not from me; do not

abandon me; for I am a sinful man! We cannot be grateful enough to our Saviour for his wonderful goodness in remaining with us to the end of the world in his bodily presence, and offering himself every day in the holy Mass as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins.

I. The holy Mass is an infinite thanksgiving for the infinite goodness of God in our regard;

II. The holy Mass is an infinitely powerful means of receiving continually all imaginable fresh benefits from God.

In the Old Law sacrifices of thanksgiving were instituted, by which the faithful testified to God the grateful feelings of their hearts for all the good things they received from him. God himself prescribed to the Israelites certain feast-days in the year, on which the people had to assemble and offer sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for different special benefits; such, for instance, as their being brought out of Egypt, freed so miraculously from the heavy yoke of Pharao, and settled in the promised land; their being wonderfully fed in the desert with the Manna or bread from heaven; their having received the Law through Moses; their having been so often assisted in a most wonderful manner by God to gain the victory over their enemies, and many similar favors. Every year they had to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to God in memory of those benefits.

Christians, how many good things have we not hitherto received from our loving and most generous God! Ah, what am I saying? What good thing is there that we do not owe to Him? What have we within or without us, that we must not with thankful hearts ascribe to the inexhaustible goodness of God? Consider yourselves, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot; are you not simply made up of benefits received from God? From the first moment of our lives to the present, can we find a single instant in which we have not enjoyed the fruits of the divine liberality? "What shall I render to the Lord," we should all say with David, "for all the things he hath rendered to me?" (Ps. 115 : 12.) Ah,

yes, what return can I make the Lord for all the benefits he has bestowed on me? Must I not, then, acknowledge with the same David in all humility: "My substance is as nothing before thee?" (Ps. 38 : 6.) "What wages shall we give him?" we may well ask, as the younger Tobias said to his father out of gratitude to the companion of his journey. "Oh, what can be worthy of his benefits?" (Tob. 12 : 2.) What can I give to God that will be an adequate return for his goodness to me?

There is something I can do. I am not so poor as I thought. I have in my power a hidden treasure which is infinitely pleasing to God, and which he cannot refuse to accept; a treasure that is not only equal to all benefits he has ever conferred on me and all creatures, but even surpasses them, and is infinitely greater than all he can give to creatures outside himself. For this treasure is as great as he himself is, and it is the flesh and blood of his Son Jesus Christ, my Saviour, united with his divinity;—of that Son who is equal to him from all eternity. This treasure I have daily in my hands, and can present it to him, not only as a complete but a superabundant return for his goodness. For whenever we assist at Mass with due attention and devotion, we make the divine Generosity and Goodness an infinite return for infinite blessings; for therein we offer to the Almighty the Author of all good, who comprises in himself all riches and treasures, and that is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of the Eternal Father. This is what David foresaw in spirit when he asks: "What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he hath rendered to me?" For he at once answers: "I will take the chalice of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord. I will sacrifice to thee the sacrifice of praise; in the courts of the house of the Lord, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem" (Ps. 115: 13, 17, 19). This is one of the chief reasons, says St. Irenæus, why the Son of God instituted the Mass; namely, "that we may not be ungrateful to God." Our Lord knew well our poverty and impotence, and that of ourselves we had nothing to repay God for his goodness to us; in this wonderful manner, then, he has left us a gift that we can daily present, as he him-

self has given us to understand in the institution of this sacrifice. For the holy Evangelists say, and the priest, too, says after them, immediately before the consecration : "Who, the day before he suffered, took bread into his sacred and venerable hands, and having raised his eyes to heaven, to thee, God, his almighty Father, giving thanks to thee, blessed, and broke, and gave to his disciples." The priest admonishes all of this act of thanksgiving in the words, "Let us return thanks to the Lord our God ;" and when the server has answered, "It is right and just," he continues : "It is truly meet and just, right and available to salvation, that we should always and in all places give thanks to thee, O holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God, through Christ our Lord," whom we now offer thee by way of fitting thanksgiving for thy benefits to us.

And indeed, my dear brethren, we thus fulfil to the utmost all the obligations that gratitude imposes on us. For if true gratitude requires that we should often think of the benefits received, how can we find a better means of recalling them to our memory than the holy Mass? For therein the greatest of them all, without which the other graces and gifts of God would help us in no way, and which is the foundation and origin of them all, namely, the great work of our Redemption, the sufferings and death of our Saviour, is not merely represented as in a figure, but is really renewed and continued in a mystic manner. Therefore our Lord said, when instituting this sacrifice : "Do this for a commemoration of me" (Luke 12: 19), let it remind you of the sufferings and death by which I freed you from eternal death, and gained all heavenly gifts and graces for you. Again, if true gratitude requires that I should express my thanks to my benefactor, and praise and honor him, how could I do that better than in the Mass, in which Jesus Christ, the High-Priest, in our stead offers his heavenly Father, by way of most humble and perfect thanksgiving, an infinite honor and adequate praise ; in which we, united with our Head as his members, offer the same thanksgiving to the sovereign God ? Finally, if gratitude requires us to render some

service, or present some gift in return for the favor received, where can we find a more costly present for our good God than his own beloved Son, whom we offer to him in the Mass? Thus, by merely hearing Mass, provided we are not wanting in attention and devotion, we completely fulfil, and in the most perfect manner, all the obligations and duties of an infinite gratitude.

II. There are three ways in which we go to work when we wish to obtain a favor from a king or prince: we try to get some good friend to say a word for us, or we present a petition setting forth our wants, or else we endeavor to win the sovereign's favor by gifts and presents. The higher the person who undertakes to plead our cause, the more in favor he who hands in the petition, the more costly the gift offered, the greater is the chance of obtaining the desired favor. But if these three things are united, then, indeed, there is not the least doubt that the sovereign will accede to our wishes. In all these ways together, my dear brethren, the holy Mass is a powerful means of obtaining all imaginable favors and graces from God. For, in the first place, our advocate in the Mass is an infinitely great lord, who holds the highest place in the favor of the Almighty, and that is Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, "always living to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7 : 25), and to put in a good word in our behalf. That is what he now does in heaven, seated on his throne of glory at the right hand of the Father, where he fills the office of advocate and intercessor for his children, whom he redeemed on earth; but in the Mass he intercedes for us in a special manner, that is, with the utmost humiliation, self-abasement, annihilation of himself in the sight of God, just as he prayed for us with outstretched arms on the cross to his Father; for, as we have frequently seen already, the sacrifice of the Mass is a renewal and repetition of that of the cross. He prays for us with the powerful voice of his five sacred wounds, the marks of which he preserves in his glorified body; and never do those wounds shine so brightly as in the Mass, when he presents them to his Father. He prays, too, with the mighty

voice of his merits, which, infinite as they are, he offers to God for us. Can we, dare we think, that the petition of the Son of God, of his sacred wounds, of his precious blood, of his infinite merits, will make no impression on his Father's heart? Can there be any grace or favor too great for them to obtain?

Again, it is the same beloved Son of God who presents our petition and supplication in this holy sacrifice to his heavenly Father; for the prayers that we say while hearing Mass, and those that the priest says in his own name and that of all present, he unites with his own most powerful prayers, and thus offers them to his Eternal Father. Hence the prayers we say during holy Mass are much more efficacious in obtaining favors from God than those we say on other occasions and at other times, and a single memento that the priest makes at the altar for one who is absent is far better for the latter than even a long prayer that he might say for himself. Now, if every prayer of the just man has the right to the fulfilment of that magnificent promise that Jesus Christ makes, "Amen, amen I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you" (John 16 : 23), how much more powerful will not that prayer be, how much more speedily and efficaciously will it not be heard, when it is offered, not only in the name of Jesus Christ, but in union with his most holy prayer, with his sacred wounds, with his precious blood, with his bitter Passion and death, and with his infinite merits, and is thus presented by his own hand to God!

If the best means of obtaining a favor from a great man is to make him presents that he will be pleased to accept,—and experience teaches us that such is the case,—oh, what will we not be able to obtain by the holy Mass from God, who is already so generous and faithful! For, besides the prayer of his divine Son, we make him a most costly present; one that is infinitely greater and more precious than all imaginable gifts and graces that we desire or can hope for from him; one that is even as great as God himself; namely, Jesus Christ, his own beloved Son, in his own flesh and blood. Let the divine Generosity and Liberality give us what-

ever he pleases out of the inexhaustible treasure of his graces, still, the present that we have first made him in the Mass is worth far more than all that he can give us outside of himself. Let him give us even himself, as we hope one day to possess him forever in heaven, still we offer him in this holy sacrifice a present of equal value, and not a whit less than what he has either given us, or will give us in eternity.

Can we, then, imagine that the God of goodness, who has promised an eternal reward to him who gives a cup of cold water to a poor man in his name, and who receives that cup of cold water as if it were given to himself,—can we imagine, I ask, that such a God will refuse anything to him who offers him his own beloved Son? No; not without reason does the priest say after the consecration, in the name of all present, "That we may be filled with every heavenly grace and blessing through the same Christ, our Lord." By these words the Catholic Church shows that we may have the utmost hope and confidence of obtaining by the Mass all supernatural graces that are necessary or advantageous for our salvation. And so it is; we can thus make sure of every heavenly grace: *of the grace of true repentance* for those in the state of sin; *of the grace of constancy in good* for those who are already converted to God; *of the grace of patience* for those who are suffering trials and adversity; *of help against temptations, daily progress in virtue, the grace of perseverance*, and a *happy death* for the just; there is not a single grace for which we should not ask, not a single one that we cannot obtain by this holy sacrifice. Moreover, we can by the same means obtain those temporal favors which are not injurious to our souls, such as averting calamities from a whole town or country, being restored to health even when health is despaired of, the increase of our temporal wealth, being saved from dangers that threaten our lives, success in our business undertakings, blessings in our domestic concerns; all of which we can obtain from the divine goodness by the holy Mass.

Is it, then, possible, my dear brethren, that the Catholic Church has been obliged to command her children under pain of mortal

sin to hear Mass on Sundays and holy-days? Did you ever hear that it was necessary for a magistrate to compel the beggars and poor of the town under a heavy penalty to go to some rich man who daily distributes generous alms? And what else are we but poor beggars in the sight of God? If we consider ourselves from head to foot, we shall find that we are nothing but poverty and misery, and that we are every moment in need of help from the hands of God; that our wretchedness, both of soul and body, constantly requires the divine assistance. But daily an inexhaustible treasury of graces and gifts is opened to us in the Mass on our altars, and yet we must be compelled to go on certain days to find it! Should not our poverty be a sufficient reason for us to have recourse every day to this infallible means of obtaining favors and graces? Come, then, in all your troubles and temptations, in all your doubts, difficulties, and dangers, come to Mass! Give your petition into the hands of Jesus Christ, that he may present it for you to his heavenly Father; and say to him with child-like confidence, when you wish to obtain any favor for your soul: Behold, O my God, the present I here offer thee is infinitely great; what I ask of thee is infinitely smaller and less valuable than what I give thee; thy Son has promised that thou wilt give us whatever we ask of thee in his name; wilt thou, then, refuse the trifle I ask of thee, although I make thee such a magnificent present? No, that cannot be. Ask and you shall receive! Much more shall you receive when you have the prayer and sacrifice of the Son of God interceding for you. Never let your work hinder you from this holy practice; the half-hour that you spend in it will certainly bring no loss to your business, but rather blessing and increase. If sometimes you are so busy that you cannot find time to hear Mass, or so ill that you are unable to go out, then go at least in heart and desire, and offer up in your thoughts to God all the holy Masses that are said on that day. This desire will not go without its reward from the good God, who sees the heart, and takes the good will for the deed. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

HOW TO HEAR MASS WITH FRUIT.

"*And then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift.*" *Matt.* 5 : 24.

God is not always and on every occasion pleased with sacrifice; for the Gospel of this day says: "*If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee,*" that is, that you are living in hatred, disunion, or enmity with any one, "*leave there thy offering before the altar;*" such a sacrifice does not please me. "*Go first to be reconciled to thy brother.*" Forgive him from your heart, renew your friendship with him, and then you can return, and I will receive your sacrifice favorably: "*And then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift.*" I have already preached four sermons on the holy Mass, and have shown that it is *an infinitely holy sacrifice*, in which God offers and God is offered; that it is a sacrifice by which we offer *infinite adoration, honor, and glory to the divine Majesty: a sacrifice of atonement* whereby we offer to God's justice an infinite satisfaction for our sins; *a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving* whereby we offer infinite thanks to the divine Generosity for all the benefits conferred on us, and at the same time present him with a gift of infinite value, to obtain from him all imaginable fresh graces and favors. And yet this most holy sacrifice does not help all who assist at it in an equal degree, nor does it offer to God the same honor, gratitude, and thanksgiving on all occasions, nor do all who hear Mass derive therefrom the same advantage and fruit, or receive the same graces and favors.

I. What is the cause of that?

II. In what way should we assist at Mass, in order to receive many favors and graces by it?

All the holy sacraments have a special strength and efficacy either to atone for our sin, to increase sanctifying grace and

our future glory in heaven, or to obtain new graces and benefits from God. This efficacy they have by the work itself that is performed in them, through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ which are united to the sacramental action. This is the chief difference between the Sacraments of the Jews in the Old Law and ours. The former obtained nothing from God beyond what their own prayer, devotion, fervor, reverence, and especially their belief in the coming of the Messias, merited for them in the sacramental action. But we Christians, besides the merit of our own devotion and other good works while receiving the Sacraments, gain also a great treasure of grace, which is immediately conferred on us out of the inexhaustible merits of the Passion and death of Christ; yet, even our Sacraments do not of themselves cause the same degree of grace in every one who receives them, but gives more to some and less to others, according to the difference of disposition, capacity, and preparation on the part of the recipient. For instance, two persons go to holy Communion on the same day, at the same time; both are in the state of grace (that must be taken as a matter of course, for no sacrament produces its effect, Baptism and Penance excepted, unless he who receives it is free from the guilt of mortal sin); both receive in the holy Communion Jesus Christ, the Author and Dispenser of grace; and yet one will be richer in grace than the other and will merit more, because he has prepared himself better and has more charity than the other.

It is nearly the same with the Mass, which contains infinite treasures and graces, because Jesus Christ, the true God, is himself the priest and the victim therein. By virtue of this sacrifice, when we assist at it with due attention, besides the merits of our own devotion and prayers, we also gain each time something of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, who offers himself for us to his Eternal Father; we receive also those graces which we have not merited ourselves, but which Christ has merited for us, and, moreover, something is always remitted of the punishment due to our past sins by virtue of the Passion and death of Christ, which for this purpose is mystically renewed in the Mass.

We obtain from God what we ask, not merely in virtue of our prayer, but also on account of that most powerful prayer which Christ offers for us on the altar, and presents to his Father in our name. And yet, not all receive an equal share of the effects, fruits, and graces of this holy sacrifice. The first part of these fruits comes to him for whom the Mass is said, whether he be living or dead, if he is still in want of it. The second part comes to him who has the Mass said by a priest selected for the purpose. The third comes to the priest himself who celebrates the holy mystery, according to the measure of his devotion and charity. The fourth comes to him who serves the Mass. The fifth, to all Christians present who assist at the holy sacrifice with due attention and devotion. The sixth, to the Church at large, and to all the faithful, especially to those whom the priest makes a particular memento for, recommending them to God.

With regard, now, to those who assist at Mass—and it is of them alone that I now speak—we must remember that the fruits of this divine sacrifice, that is, the merits, satisfaction, and the graces of Jesus Christ, are given and dispensed to them according to the measure of the devotion, reverence, fervor, and good intention with which they hear Mass. Such is the reason why the Catholic Church places in the mouth of the priest, before the consecration, in the memento of the living, the words: "And of all present whose faith and devotion are known to thee, for whom we offer." From this it follows that one man can gain greater treasures of grace in one Mass than another who hears ten, twenty, or thirty Masses, if the former has more devotion, reverence, and charity during the one Mass than the other in the many Masses. It is like what would happen if a large sum of money, or a spring of water, were left open for every one, to take what he likes; he who has the larger hand, or the more capacious vessel, carries off the most money or water. If his hand is small, he can take only a little money; if the vessel is narrow or full of holes, it cannot contain much water, or it allows what has been poured into it to flow out again. Let a grown-up man put his hand into

the coffer, and he will take away a large sum, whereas a little child will not be able to carry off much ; and if the child puts in only two fingers it will have less still ; but if one who is present does not stretch out his hand at all, he will have nothing. What is the Mass ? It is an inexhaustible spring of all imaginable graces and gifts of God, which we owe to the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is an immense treasure of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, a treasure which lies open to all who assist at this sacrifice, so that they can take from it what they please. The hand that we put into the treasure, the vessel with which we draw from this spring of grace, is the faith and fervor of devotion with which we hear Mass. According, then, as we are more or less fervent, or tepid and cold, or distracted and utterly inattentive, we shall derive more or less fruit, or even none at all, from the Mass.

It seems to me that this is just what happened on Mount Calvary amongst the crowd who were looking on at the death of our Lord. Many of them, along with the centurion and some of those who helped to nail our Lord to the cross, received the grace of conversion and true repentance ; the good thief who was crucified beside our Lord, through his perfect contrition and detestation of his sins, received complete pardon and was assured by Christ himself that he would be that day with him in paradise. St. John, in the person and name of the whole Catholic Church, received Mary, the Blessed Virgin, as his loving mother ; while she adopted as her children all the faithful in the person of St. John. Magdalene and the other holy women who accompanied our Lord to the place of execution, and remained with him till the end, received a great increase of sanctifying grace. There were others who derived no fruit whatever, although they were present at the crucifixion, through want of faith in Jesus Christ, their Saviour ; nay, many, and perhaps the greater number, on account of their blindness and obstinacy, became more hardened in guilt, made their sins more inexcusable, and increased their eternal damnation. There you have an exact picture of the different sorts of Chris-

tians who assist in our churches at the bloodless sacrifice of the Mass. Some hundreds of Catholics hear Mass at the same time in the same church, in which the adorable flesh and blood of Christ is offered up to God for all of them, while the same inexhaustible spring of grace, the same infinite treasure, lies open to each and every one ; but if we could see the state of their souls when they come out of the church after the holy sacrifice, we should find a great difference between them. Some return home striking their breasts like the people on Calvary : "they returned striking their breasts" (Luke 23 : 48). For many Christians, after having heard Mass, are converted by the virtue of that adorable sacrifice, and return home justified before God. Others are clothed with a still more beautiful robe of sanctifying grace than that which they brought to church. Many a one goes away just as poor and miserable as when he came, without having gained the least merit. Many a one, like the scribes and high-priests, who assisted at the death of the Son of God for the sole purpose of mocking and laughing at his suffering, come away from the holy sacrifice still more abominable, and deformed, and hardened in guilt than he was before.

For, what advantage can they expect who hear Mass through mere fashion and routine? who are present in the body only, while their minds and hearts are a thousand miles away? who do not consider what this sacrifice is, and why it is offered, and therefore have neither a lively faith nor a good supernatural intention ? who, during the whole time of Mass almost, allow their thoughts, desires, and eyes to roam about unchecked ? who on Sundays and holy-days, through fear of eternal damnation and on account of the command of the Church, seek out the shortest Mass they can find ? for, half-an-hour seems too long for them, and they are impatient for the Mass to come to an end. I would not give much for the merit gained by such people. They have had a vast treasure in their power, but did not think it worth while to stretch forth their hands to seize it ; they were at a spring of grace, but the vessels they carried were full of holes, so that not a drop of the heavenly

water remains to them. And what are we to think of those half-Christians, who misbehave in such a manner during Mass that all pious Catholics must be scandalized at them? For they hardly bend both knees even at the elevation, when the great God is held up for public adoration; they keep on laughing and talking, and reading the news, and speaking of it; nay, they cast their impure eyes, thoughts, and desires on others, to whom they make more profound reverences than to their God who is offered for them on the altar; and often their only object in going to church is to conduct thither some fashionable lady, or to bring her home again. What advantage can such people expect to find in the Mass? Truly, the only treasure they will gain from it will be that of which St. Paul speaks: "But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works" (Rom. 2: 5, 6). Instead of paying due honor to the divine Majesty in the Mass, they offer him the greatest insults and injuries; instead of satisfying the divine Justice for their sins, they make themselves guilty of fresh sacrilegious sins; instead of receiving many graces and favors from the goodness of God, they place a rod in the hands of the divine Justice to chastise themselves, and thus wickedly pervert the means of salvation into one of destruction to their souls and deeper damnation in eternity.

II. The chief thing necessary to hear Mass with profit to our souls, and that on which all the rest depends, is, due attention, reverence, and fervent devotion during the whole time of the holy sacrifice. We shall have and retain that devotion and reverence if, on entering the church, or when the priest is going to the altar, we remember with a lively faith that now is about to commence that incomprehensible mystery of the renewal of the Passion and death of Christ, at which the heavenly spirits cover their faces and tremble with awe; in which the Son of God is the high-priest who offers, and also the victim who is offered to God; by which in-

finite honor is given to the Blessed Trinity, while the goodness of God receives an infinite thanksgiving for his benefits, his justice an infinite atonement for all the sins of the world, and to us mortals is thus opened an infinite treasure of all imaginable graces.

This thought must necessarily fill us with a holy awe and a great desire to assist at such an adorable sacrifice with the most perfect intention ; and that intention is the other requisite to hear Mass with profit. It may be formed for the fourfold end already mentioned, in the following or some similar way : I prostrate myself with the utmost humility, before thy face, O Lord worthy of all love and honor, and I offer thee with the priest this sacrifice of the flesh and blood of thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and unite myself completely in life and death according to thy holy will with that same sacrifice. I offer it to Thee for thy infinite honor and glory, as a sacrifice of thanksgiving for all the benefits conferred on me and all creatures ; to appease thy just anger against me, a poor sinner ; in satisfaction for my sins and those of the whole world. There you have a form of intention for hearing Mass, such as you can find easily in any prayer-book.

They who do not understand it, or who through want of schooling cannot read, would do well to say in the beginning of Mass : My Sovereign God, I have not studied, and know not how to speak to thee, nor how to act becomingly during this holy sacrifice ; but I unite my intention with that of Jesus Christ, and wish to say to thee all that he says in this sacred mystery. Believe me, that an intention of this kind is not a foolish one, but, when it comes from a well-meaning heart, is rather most pleasing to God and profitable for the soul.

If you were to do nothing else during the whole Mass but kneel down, and with folded hands and eyes downcast, or directed to the altar, keep on continually renewing that intention in thought, thus fixing your whole heart on the adorable sacrifice, you would hear Mass in a most excellent and profitable manner. A pious soul once said : I am sometimes filled with such darkness in the mind, and such dryness and want of fervor in spirit, that I sit there like a

stock or a stone, and cannot say one devout prayer; yet I do not interrupt my prayer, but keep myself during the holy Mass always in presence of Jesus Christ, just as a hungry dog lies down at his master's table, expecting to get the crumbs that fall from it. Think of this, pious Christians, who mean well towards your God, if you find no pleasure or fervor even in the thoughts of God himself when you are engaged in works of devotion; by thus humbly placing yourselves before him, you will receive and merit more from him than you would on other occasions by long, fervent prayers filled with consolations. Finally, they who, after having made an intention of that kind, read their prayer-books or say the rosary during Mass, should unite their prayer with that which Jesus Christ offers his heavenly Father for us in this holy sacrifice, and briefly renew their intention several times, especially in the three principal parts of the Mass, the Offertory, the Consecration, and the Communion; and if they are saying the rosary, they could cast a flying thought at the holy sacrifice when they come to the name Jesus in the Hail Mary; for instance, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus, who now offers himself for us to his eternal Father." O dear Christians, if you thus heard Mass, what great honor and glory you should give to God; how you should blot out the punishment due to your sins; what an immense treasure of merits you should heap up for eternity; what copious graces and benefits you should ask and obtain from the divine Liberality! Then would be verified in you the words of St. Paul: "I give thanks to my God always for you, for the grace of God that is given you in Christ Jesus: that in all things you are made rich in him, so that nothing is wanting to you in any grace." Ah, would to God that I had known this before, and had always heard Mass in that way! Hitherto I have heard Mass, and yet I did not rightly understand what a precious mystery it is, and what immense graces God had prepared for me in it. Therefore in future I will hear Mass with such faith, intention, devotion, attention, and reverence, that I may merit after this short life to see face to face that God and Saviour whom I now adore and offer on the altar under the appearances of bread and wine. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MOTIVES AND MEANS FOR HELPING THE SOULS IN PURGATORY.

"I have compassion on the multitude." *Mark* 8 : 2.

The privations of these poor people who were almost dying of hunger bring before my mind the sufferings of the poor souls in Purgatory, who have to remain in that prison, not merely for three days, but in many cases for years and years, unceasingly sighing and crying out to heaven : "Have mercy, Lord, have mercy ! Free us from this prison, that we may see thee whom we so long for !" And meanwhile that omnipotent and most merciful Lord, who was moved to compassion at the sight of the hungry multitude, so that he wrought a miracle to supply their wants, hears the sighs and lamentations of the suffering souls, and as far as he himself is concerned, has the greatest desire to free them at once, and bring them to heaven ; but his divine justice demands full satisfaction for the debt they owe him on account of their sins, and to that end he recommends them to those who are still living on earth, and who can help them by satisfying for them. Hence they cry out to us in the words of Job : "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends" (Job. 19 : 21). If our hearts are human they should easily be moved to compassion, and we should try in every possible way to help those poor souls in their extreme necessity.

I. To help the poor souls is a most excellent act of the love of God ;

II. By what means especially, can and should we help those souls ?

I. All souls in Purgatory are dear children of God ; and they are more assured of that relationship than the most pious and holy souls in this life, whose conscience gives testimony, as St. Paul says, "that we are the sons of God, and if sons, heirs also ;

heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8 : 16, 17), but who are not certain, at all events infallibly, that they will always remain children of God, for they are constantly in danger of losing the grace of God by sin, and becoming children of eternal damnation. But the soul in Purgatory is beyond all danger, doubt, and fear, and is quite assured and certain that it is and will always remain a chosen child of God, and can infallibly expect to share in the eternal inheritance. Now if no father or mother on earth has such a tender love for his or her only son as the Lord God has for his children, even for those who being still in this life can become children of the devil, how exceedingly great and tender must not be the love of God for a just soul in the next life? And, therefore, how great must not be the desire of the Almighty God to receive his beloved child into his own house, that is, into the kingdom of heaven, and to see him there? "My delight is to be with the children of men" (Prov. 8 : 31), he says himself; as if their society were a source of new joy to him, and he could not be completely happy until they share in his bliss.

These dear children of God, as during their pilgrimage on earth they wandered from the right path, either by grievous sins of which they repented or by small daily faults and transgressions, have fallen into the hands of the enemy, and are kept imprisoned in a gloomy dungeon far from their Father's house. These spouses of Christ are suffering more than mortal pains, and cannot yet go to the feast prepared for them; for the infinite justice and holiness of God requires that they should pay the necessary amount of satisfaction. Our heavenly Father hears those dear children of his, Christ hears his beloved spouses sighing and moaning in their prison, and longing to be released; he has the greatest desire to help them and bring them to himself in heaven; but his justice does not permit it, and insists on full atonement for all, even to the last farthing.

Now, what a great act of charity it is, and how pleasing it must be to God, to satisfy the claims of his justice by prayers and

other good works, and so to free those souls out of prison, and enable them to enter heaven, and to share in the glory of their heavenly Father and Spouse. Let it suffice to remember what he himself says in the Gospel, namely, that he will accept that act of charity with as much joy and pleasure as if it were done to himself: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25 : 40). These words are to be understood of the souls in Purgatory.

Beside the pleasure, what great honor and glory can we thus give to the Almighty! For by that act of charity we send to God souls that will praise his infinite majesty sooner than they otherwise would have done, and will most perfectly know, love, and honor him in heaven. We poor mortals, as long as we are wandering about in the darkness of this vale of tears, can neither know nor praise God properly; but when the soul, separated from the body, first sees the face of its God it receives a most perfect knowledge of that most supreme Good worthy of all love, and from that knowledge must necessarily spring seraphic flames of love that will burn incessantly for all eternity.

Should not this *one* motive be enough to animate us to help the Poor Souls in every possible way? Think of the countless benefits we owe the divine Goodness every moment of our lives; there we have a means of making a return for them, and of paying our own debts to some extent. Let us, then, make use of the means that are best adapted to free from Purgatory those souls that are so dear to God. What are those means?

II. Prayers and Masses and alms.

1. Immediately after the death of one of our loved ones we are wont to spend the time in giving way to grief and lamentation, in preparing a mourning dress and a respectable funeral, and in receiving visits of condolence, mostly from people who are little concerned about the death of our friend; they wish to show their sympathy out of courtesy alone, because such is the custom, and

their visits are often wearisome enough to us under the circumstances. Amongst all those troublesome preparations, that are not of the least use to the deceased, we hardly bestow a thought on his or her soul, which is then most in need of help. That is, indeed, a selfish system of mourning, which is directed more to our own honor than to freeing the soul of the departed from Purgatory, for which latter object little or nothing is done. The souls in Purgatory attach no value to magnificent funeral obsequies, and are not in the least benefited by them. How is it that pride can still find a place in the midst of mourning and lamentation? With all this useless extravagance, nothing is done for the help or consolation of the soul. Those people are not aware that they can show their love for the departed soul far better with a short prayer than with all that vain pomp. Do you wish to honor the dead? Then give alms; for what is the use of vain weeping? What advantage is to be derived from useless funeral pomp? You should rather put forth every effort to help the departed by alms, prayers, and Masses. Men must weep and show their sorrow; we cannot refuse them the consolation they find in shedding tears at the death of a dear friend, but with far greater earnestness, zeal, and care should they endeavor to help the departed soul by sacrifice, prayer, and almsgiving. In the Book of his Confessions, St. Augustine praises his mother, St. Monica, because on the approach of her death she gave no instructions concerning the embalming of her body or her burial. "She left us no injunctions concerning matters of that kind; her only request was that she should not be forgotten at the altar."

2. Another still more powerful means of helping the Poor Souls is almsgiving and other works of mercy. Almsgiving has a greater power of satisfying than prayer.

3. The third means is readiness to forgive injuries and to love our enemies; for since this love is more heroic and makes man more like to God, so also it brings the departed relief more

speedily and efficaciously. I prove this by an example. There was in Bologna a rich and noble widow to whose house an assassin, utterly unknown to her, had fled to escape the pursuit of the officers of justice. Through pity she concealed him, and even after she had learned that it was her only son, the sole hope of her declining years, who had been slain by him in the public street (I leave you to imagine, my dear brethren, with what grief she heard the news), she still continued to practise the duties of Christian charity toward the murderer; for she gave him her murdered son's best horse and a sum of money that he might more easily escape. After this heroic act, she went to pray for her son, when he appeared to her in glory, and said: Cease praying for me, mother; the heroic act of virtue that you performed in pardoning my murderer and doing good to him has freed me from Purgatory, in which I should otherwise have had to spend many years. O my dear brethren, love your enemies! Do good to those that hate you, pray for those who persecute and do evil to you; and you will most certainly and efficaciously help the Poor Souls.

4. You can even help them with still less trouble? We have the means of doing that almost daily in the indulgences that the Church so frequently grants; that is, by the satisfaction for the punishment due to sin, which flows from the merits of Christ and his Saints as from an inexhaustible spring, whereby countless souls have been already freed from Purgatory, and been enabled to enter into the joys of heaven. Almost every time you receive holy Communion, or say the rosary or litany, or do some work of charity, or attend morning devotions, you can gain an immense treasure, with which, if you wish to offer it for the Poor Souls, you can pay off what they still owe the divine Justice. Think of this, and keep it constantly before your minds.

Fasting, mortification, penitential works, patience in adversity, nay, all good works that are performed in the state of grace are also available to help and relieve the souls of the departed, but,

according to the Council of Trent, there is nothing better for that purpose, nothing which the Poor Souls long for more eagerly, than the holy Mass, in which the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, that is, an infinite treasure of satisfaction, is offered to our heavenly Father for the living and the dead.

II. Hence they are very cruel who do not at once execute the pious legacies of the departed. He is guilty of mortal sin who, without just reason, through avarice or carelessness, defers for a notable period the execution of such testaments. The delay of six months, that is granted in Canon Law to executors, is only intended to save them from the punishment inflicted by external tribunals on those who are guilty of such negligence. But neither the divine nor the natural law, nor equity, nor justice, could tolerate such a delay in conscience, and they who are guilty of it commit a mortal sin. You defer for such a long time the saying of the Masses or the giving the alms willed by your former friend, and meanwhile he has to languish in the midst of frightful torments!

Christians, help the Suffering Souls; let your sighs and prayers intercede for them, and the sacrifices you offer satisfy for them. Help them by fervent prayer, by alms-deeds and works of Christian charity, by forgiving injuries, by indulgences, by patience in trials, but especially by the blood of Jesus Christ by hearing Mass, a means that we can employ daily. Imagine, when you are entering the church to hear Mass, that you see the Poor Souls standing at the door like beggars, and with folded hands imploring an alms from you; remember, too, that they are all dear children of God, who are kept away from their heavenly Father, and are sighing to be released from their prison. You should remember that the Poor Souls are deserving of compassion, and that you can help them without spending a penny, and give them a rich alms by hearing Mass. Amen.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

ON THE HOLINESS OF OUR DAILY ACTIONS.

"*He that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" *Matt.* 7: 21.

To think in the heart, or say with the lips, "Lord, Lord!" to pray, fast, give alms, practise all kinds of devotions, to be enrolled in different sodalities, to honor the Mother of God and the Saints —all these are good works; but they are worth nothing unless that one necessary condition is fulfilled, namely, *to do the will of God.* He who does that will enter into the kingdom of heaven. This text gives me an opportunity of speaking of the conformity and union of our will with the will of God. This conformity consists first, in this, that man fulfils the will of God and does what God requires of him; and secondly, that man is content with the will of God and readily submits to all that God appoints for him. If I observe these two things, then my will is in full conformity with the divine will. To fulfil the will of God is to do and omit what God wills us to do and omit; to do it or omit it when God wills, how God wills, because God wills, and for no other reason but simply for God's sake; and that is to be observed in everything without exception.

I. To do and omit what God wills us to do and omit, therein consists Christian piety and holiness.

II. But what does God wish each one of us to do and omit?

If Christian perfection and holiness of life consisted in apparitions, ecstasies, prophecies, healing the sick, raising the dead to life, and other miraculous works, then we should all have reason for despairing of attaining perfection and holiness, and God, who wishes us all to be holy—would require of us what far exceeds the faculties of our nature, and what he gives only to a very few, in

order to show forth his power. There are many who have led perfect lives without working miracles. We do not read that St. John the Baptist worked miracles, although, there was none greater than he among all the men born of women. Therefore our Lord assures us that he will not know his elect by that test on the last day: "Many will say to me on that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles in thy name?" (Matt. 7:22.) But what reward will they receive from him? "And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity "(Matt. 7:23).

If to every one who wishes to attain perfection were said the words that our Lord spoke to the young man whom he loved, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" (Matt. 19: 21), then, indeed, most people would go away sorrowful like that young man: "And when the young man had heard this word, he went away sad" (Matt. 19: 22). Nor would there in that case be any chance of perfection for people living in the world in the different states to which the providence of God has called them, and they would be all obliged to leave their business, their occupations, and whatever other worldly duties they have to attend to, so that the whole world would become a vast convent. No, God wishes that we should try to become perfect and holy in whatever state of life we may be; and therefore this perfection must consist in something that can be found in every state. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were rich; yet these and many others served God in the midst of their wealth, and led lives that were pleasing to him.

If Christian perfection consisted in performing very difficult and extraordinary outward actions, in many long prayers, in sublime meditations, in subtle contemplations, in constant watchings, fasting, alms-giving, bodily mortifications, and other austerities, such as we wonder at in the lives of hermits and Religious, there would not be much chance then, either, for most people to attain

perfection. For many a one could urge in excuse that he is not strong enough to bear such a heavy burden, and poor beggars and other poverty-stricken people would be badly off, since they have not the means of giving alms, and must rather receive them from others; nor could sick and bedridden people become holy, for they are forbidden to pray, or fast much, or to practise any bodily austerities; and such, too, would be the case with all those whose duties or occupations give them no time, or whose ignorance prevents them from performing those outward works of devotion. Christian perfection. In what does it consist? To live holily nothing more is required than that every one keeps in the state of grace and always does what God wills him to do. This is the sole foundation of all holiness and piety. If I do a good work, it is good because it is in conformity with the will of God; if I do evil it is evil because it is contrary to the will of God. God has neither advantage from our good works nor harm from our evil ones. No matter what we do, we cannot lessen by an iota his infinite happiness, which he has in and of himself, nor can we add anything to it. If all the men that were ever in the world were in hell, and cursing and blaspheming him forever, he would not be less happy. If all the men in the world were in heaven praising and blessing him, he would not be more happy than he is; he would still remain what he is from all eternity. Not he who performs great and extraordinary outward works of piety is to be looked on as the best and most perfect servant of God, but he who in all circumstances does what God wishes him to do, no matter how trifling the thing may be in itself.

Go in thought to the house at Nazareth, and there you will see an evident and, at the same time, a most wonderful example of this in the Holy of holies, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who is the model and pattern of all virtue and perfection for all men. What was his occupation while dwelling there. "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them" (Luke 2 : 51). To whom was he subject? To a poor carpenter, his foster-father, and to a young virgin, his mother. In what? In

things that were suitable to such a lowly household ; he laid the table, swept out the house, collected the shavings, brought wood to the fire, carried the tools to his foster-father, helped him in his work; in a word, he acted as a servant and apprentice to the trade. Nor did his neighbors look on him in any other light, nor had they any other name for him than that of the carpenter's son. And were those occupations befitting the Son of God ? To sweep out the house, and collect the shavings ? Had he nothing better to do ? Did he not come down from heaven to renew the whole world, to redeem men, to show them the way to heaven, and to spread everywhere the glory of his Father ? Yet behold, he spends the greater part of his life hidden away in a poor hut, and leads a lowly, abject, and apparently useless life. Could he not have made a better use of so much precious time ? Could he not have turned his immense wealth of gifts and graces to better account ? Why did he not go about the world teaching and instructing, giving good example and proving his divinity by miracles ? If he had done so, he might have converted all men, brought them to heaven, and so furthered the glory of his Father, which was the only reason why he became man. Filled with astonishment, then, I ask again, why did he shut himself up in the midst of such lowly occupations for so many years, while the world was quite ignorant that it possessed its God and its Saviour ? Ah, my dear brethren, hear what he himself says in explanation of his conduct : " I came down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6 : 38) ; and again : "For I do always the things that please him" (John 8 : 20). These occupations, which we consider mean, were appointed for him by his heavenly Father at that time ; and therefore the Son of God could not find anything that was more pleasing to God, more holy, or more perfect. He honored his Father as much when he was picking up the shavings in the workshop as when he proclaimed the glory of God in the streets of Jerusalem by his preaching and miracles, for in one thing as well as in the other he fulfilled the divine will. So that the perfection and holiness of the Christian does not consist in great and

wonderful deeds, as many imagine, but in doing at all times the will of God.

II. How am I always to know what God wishes me to do at different times and in different places?

Will he reveal his will to me? We must not expect an angel to come from heaven to enlighten us on this point. For we know well enough what the Lord wishes from us. And first, with regard to his commandments and the precepts of the Church, they are public enough and well known, and his wish is that we should keep them inviolably, and not transgress them in the least in thought, word, or deed. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19 : 17). Again, it is God's will that we should be satisfied with all he has ordained for us and those who belong to us, and accept all the accidents of life, whether they be pleasing to us or not, with readiness from his fatherly hand; for, sin alone excepted, nothing happens in the world without the permission or will of God. This holds good for all men. Besides these general laws there are still some special works or omissions that God requires from each individual in particular. And how are we to know what those things are? Let each one look to the state in which God has placed him, and see what are its daily duties and obligations.

These, and nothing else, are what God expects him to fulfil. If you do them well, as it is in your power to do them, you do what God wills; for it was for the purpose of fulfilling those duties that he called you to the state you occupy.

To explain this I will use a simile. You have seen all kinds of personages in a theatre; one struts the stage magnificently dressed as a king, others follow him as his attendants; they who surround him are his soldiers and satellites; on one side there is a peasant, on the other a fool, or a poor beggar. Now, who is the best off among the actors? As long as the play lasts we certainly should say that the king and his lords are best off as regards magnificence of appearance, while it is quite the contrary with the clown and

the beggar. But who acts his part best? Who wins most applause from the public? That is a matter in which people do not consider the dress worn, nor the dignity of the character represented, but simply whether the actor does his part well or ill. If the king were to appear clownish, the peasant polite, the beggar proud, the fool clever, none of them would act his part well; the whole piece would be a failure. The more clownish the peasant is, the more miserable the begger, the more silly the fool, the better the play. And why? Because the characters require to be so represented; and thus it happens sometimes that the beggar wins the most applause, because the king and his attendants do not perform their parts properly.

2. We mortals are in this world as on a stage; we are acting a play, as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "We are made a spectacle to the world, and to Angels, and to men" (1. Cor. 4 : 9), who are the audience; the characters are distributed by the almighty God, and there are as many of them as there are states, occupations, and trades in the world. "We are fools for Christ's sake," continues the same Apostle; "but you are wise in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are honorable, but we are without honor" (1. Cor. 4 : 10). Rich, poor; sick, healthy; master, servant; prince, peasant; merchant, soldier, tradesman; cleric, layman; married, single; young, old; men, women; parents, children; teacher, scholar; joyful, sorrowful,—all these are different characters. Some, indeed, appear to be better off and happier in the part assigned to them, while others are miserable and unhappy; but when the last act is played, and the curtain is dropped at the hour of death, then, as far as worldly dignity is concerned, we are all alike, and our whole claim to praise, honor, and reward lies in the manner in which we have played the parts allotted us by God, that is, the manner in which we have fulfilled the duties and obligations of our state. If I am found wanting in that, although I may have transported mountains by my faith, I have done nothing, and have acted against the will of God.

From this it follows

1. That the wisdom and goodness of God must be wonderful, since he has made the way to perfection so easy and secure for every one.

2. How little we are to be excused before God if we do not use every effort to become holy and perfect ; for every man, no matter who or what he is, or in what state, can attain perfection simply by doing what he is bound in any case to do daily, provided he does it as well as he can.

3. How much they are mistaken who have high ideas of true Christian holiness and perfection, and imagine that it consists in prayers, holy Communions, outward works of piety, hearing many Masses, and chastising the body. If they do these things, they think they are all right, while they utterly neglect the duties of their state, because they have not the name of being works of devotion. I was good yesterday, they say, and I will be good again to-day, and perform my devotions. What do you mean ? Good ? You must be good every day ; but what special thing did you do yesterday, and what do you mean to do to-day ? I went to confession and holy Communion, I heard four Masses one after the other, I gave alms to the poor and went to church in the afternoon, when public devotions were being held ; I will do the same to-day. That is all very good, but it is not enough. The next thing you have to do, and in fact the chief thing that belongs to Christian piety, is to fulfil the duties of your state exactly, to be always satisfied with the arrangements of God's providence, to be patient under crosses and trials. If you forget this latter, I would not give much for your piety. Do this always, and you will always be pious as you should be.

4. How unreasonable the complaints of those who say that they cannot do good on account of their many although necessary occupations, or because they are weak and sickly. Why can you not do good ? Oh, I have no time, I have a lot of little children in the house, says a mother, and they keep me going all day. I,

says another, have to run about on business. I, says a servant, am kept at it so constantly that I have hardly half an hour on Sundays and holy-days to hear Mass, while on the week days I can with difficulty find a quarter of an hour for my prayers. Ah, says the sick man, I am so weak and suffering! I would willingly go to church and do what others do, but my sickness prevents me; I can hardly manage to say a rosary. Poor people! you do not know what it means to do good! That very work, or business, or weakness that hinders you from prayer and outward works of piety, is according to the will of God, who has ordained that for you in your state of life. You have only to be resigned, and go on with your occupation, or suffer your illness with a good intention for God's sake, and then you will really do good; for, if you were to undertake anything else that could not be harmonized with that, you would act against the will of God.

I conclude with the words of our Lord to the young man: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor." Shall I address those words to you too? No, that would not suit people living in the world. But do you wish to be perfect in your state? Then let your chief care be to perform perfectly the daily duties that God has imposed on you, and do not neglect even the least of them. Oh, what consolation for a soul that loves God to think, I am now doing what God wills. I am getting up in the morning, and I am well aware that I cannot do anything more pleasing to God just now. I am hearing holy Mass, doing my work, waiting in my shop, writing and studying, eating and drinking at table, saying my night prayers, going to bed and sleeping, and I am certain that all this is the will of God. What a consolation in the evening to have spent a whole day in that manner! What a comfort at the hour of death to think that I have thus spent my whole life praising and blessing God! What joy and happiness in eternity to see that our worthless, mean, daily actions are the fruitful seed of such unspeakable glory which we shall possess forever in heaven! Should not this encourage us to perform the duties of our state with the greatest

perfection and zeal? "He that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Amen.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE ORDER AND MANNER IN WHICH TO DO OUR DAILY WORK.

"*The same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods.*"
Luke 16 : 1.

What are we in this life? We are all stewards of God the great Master; the goods that he has entrusted to us are our souls and the gifts and graces that he has bestowed on each one of us. What use should we make of them? We should use them to do his holy will, namely, to do what he wishes us to do; that is, each one, besides keeping the commandments of God and the Church, must fulfil the obligations of his state, and perform daily the different duties that are obligatory on him according to the nature of his office or employment. But this alone is not enough; we can be guilty of wasting those goods and good works, like the steward in the Gospel, if we do not attend to them in such a way as to make them bring in as much before God as they ought. How, then, are we to perform our daily duties? I answer—

I. They must be performed when *God wills.*
II. They must be performed as *God wills.*

I. The ordinary duties that God expects us to perform according to our different states must be performed when God wills, if we wish to act well and holily; that is, they must be done *at the proper time* and *in due order.* To pray when we should eat; to eat and drink when we should sleep; to sleep when we should work; to work when we should go to church; to observe one order to-day and another to-morrow—that would be to lead an ill-ordered life and to act in a foolish and un-Christian manner, contrary to the will of God. "All things have their season, and in

their times all things pass under heaven. A time to destroy and a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to keep silence and a time to speak." So, too, should a true Christian divide the day into parts, and according to the nature of his occupations and duties let each work have its appointed hour. And this hour should be fixed, so that he can say at once, without stopping to think: this is the hour for me to rise in the morning; this is the hour for retiring to rest; this is the hour for hearing Mass, for my work, for this or that devotion; on this day in each month I must go to the Sacraments; and so on for everything else he has to do. This order, once it is established, he must observe, nor allow himself to be turned aside from it by any trouble, or levity, or difficulties, or deceit of the devil, unless necessity, or Christian charity, or decency, or weakness and illness, or some affairs of great importance, such as are wont to happen with people in the world, should interfere with it. This is the way to do one's daily duty when God wills.

Oh, if every one understood how much depends on good order, of what great value and perfection it is in itself, how beautiful it is, how agreeable in the sight of God, and the great merit we acquire by it for our souls, then would those who are in the habit of observing or are compelled to observe it feel great joy and consolation in it; while they who have hitherto attached little importance to it would be encouraged to observe it, and they who on account of the many distractions their business occasions them cannot observe it in all things would at all events try to keep some order in their devotions and spiritual exercises. For, in the first place, a man thus follows the example of our all wise Creator in his external works, since he made all things in measure, number, and weight: "Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight" (Wisd. 11 : 21). The sun, the moon, the planets still keep the orderly course he has assigned to them from the beginning. Spring, summer, autumn, winter, day and night succeed each other regularly as God arranged, nor will this order cease till the end of the world.

The less a work comes from our own will and natural inclination, and the more it is in conformity with the will of God, the greater, evidently, must be its merit and perfection. This is the case with the works that I daily perform in due order; for then they are in accordance not so much with my own inclination as with a hard and fast rule which I observe through a kind of obedience promised, as it were, to God. On the other hand, it is the sign of a weak love for God when we serve him irregularly and inconstantly. Tell me; you have a servant at home, who is very diligent when he begins to work, but he is neither regular nor orderly in his ways; you cannot depend on him on account of his peculiar ideas, for he wishes to do all according to his own fancy, and goes from one thing to another as the humor leads him; if he happens to be in a good humor, he will do your bidding; but otherwise there is not the least use in expecting anything from him. What would you think of such a servant? Would he suit you? Suit me? you say; I would rather have no servant at all than such a one. The servant who is not able to do half the work but who is obedient and constant in his efforts to please me, is worth a dozen of the other; for it is an intolerable thing to have to wait till it pleases my servant to attend on me when I want anything done.

It seems to me that this might be well applied to those Christians and servants of God who frequently perform during the week works that are good and holy, but without order or regularity, and in a confused sort of way, not observing any fixed time. To-day they get up at five o'clock, because they have no desire to sleep any longer; to-morrow they rise at eight. One day they say their morning prayers with great devotion on their knees, because it suits their fancy to do so; the next day they either omit their prayers altogether, or shorten them considerably. Sometimes they get a fit of piety and hear several Masses one after the other; but when the fit is over, they remain at home and do not go near the church. To-day they pray for hours at a stretch, because they happen to feel sensible devotion and spiritual conso-

lation ; to-morrow the fervor is no longer there, and the consequence is that they hardly say a rosary properly. They read a spiritual book, because they happen to find one lying about ; but when they put it down it may be a whole month before they take it up again. This evening, because they happen to think of it, they make their examen of conscience, and kneel down with their children and servants to say evening prayers, a practice that no good father or mother ever omits, but to-morrow and the next day they will be tired of it. Three times they come to the sermon because it suits them ; but six times after that they are among the absentees. This month they go to holy Communion four times ; the next month perhaps not once. Some days they abstain from excessive drinking through mortification, and soon after they begin their old intemperate habits. In a word, they measure out the service they do for God according to their own fancies and to what may come in their way ; they do not serve God for his own sake, but for their own pleasure ; nor because he so wills it, but because it pleases them to do so now and then. Thus the Lord God must, so to speak, wait for their convenience, and catch them when they are in a good humor. But what pleasure can he find in a service of the sort ? for if he were not all-seeing and knew not the future he could never be sure of such service. How can the edifice of Christian holiness and perfection ever be finished, if we by our inconstancy allow what we have built up in one day to fall down the next ? All this is caused by the want of order, by not having a certain fixed time marked down for the day's duties. Therefore I repeat, if you wish to do the will of God in a holy manner and so that it will please him, you must do it when God wills, that is, *at the proper* time and *in the proper order*. But they must also do them as God wills.

II. By this I mean that our daily work and the duties of our state must not be performed through mere routine, or in a sleepy, slothful, careless manner, but with a cheerful, attentive, and zealous spirit, and with all possible energy and diligence,

which must be extended not merely to great and easy matters but also to those which are generally looked down upon and are therefore apt to be performed carelessly or to be omitted. We must not forget the saying: "He that feareth God neglecteth nothing" (Eccles. 7 : 19); he does nothing carelessly, but everything perfectly and with holy zeal. To be convinced of the necessity of this we have only to consider that we have a work in hand that we must do for God's sake and to please him. The greater the lord whom we serve, the more worthy he is of honor and homage, the more pleasing the work he desires from us, the greater also must be the diligence employed in the performance of the work if we wish to serve him truly and to earn his favor. A service rendered with unwillingness, that is, as if it were forced from us, and therefore faulty, causes rather disgust and displeasure than feelings of gratitude even with a common man, to say nothing of a rich lord; for it is a sign that the person to whom it is rendered is thought little of, since his will is so sluggishly carried out. And this holds good all the more when the person who has requested the service is looking on while it is being done. Wonderful is the effect of the master's eye and presence with his servants and inferiors. Go into a workshop, and there you will see the apprentices singing and idling away their time; but if the master happens to come in, there is a change at once, the singing is at end, and the work goes on briskly, as if they were vying with one another to see who could do the most. Now, if in addition to that, a good deal of the workman's own success depends on the diligence he employs, certainly he is all the more likely to make a good use of his time; even the hope of a small gain is enough to make a man take his hands out of his pockets and work.

Who is the lord for whom we have to fulfil our daily duties? He is the great, infinite God worthy of all fear and love and service, before whom all that are in heaven and on earth tremble with awe; whom the Angels wait on with veiled countenance; whom all the crowned heads of the world must humbly adore on

bended knee as his slaves; whose least sign every creature, animate and inanimate, must obey. Woe to the reasoning being who would dare to perform a service for this great Lord in a careless and imperfect manner? Hear what a terrible curse is pronounced against such servants by the prophet Jeremias: "Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully" (Jer. 68 : 10), that is, carelessly. It is a most important thing to do the work of the Lord, and for that very reason accursed is he who does it without proper care and diligence.

If God were like earthly potentates, who can be present in but one place at a time, and who can see only what is going on before their eyes, from whom much can be concealed, and who, generally speaking, are kept in ignorance of what they are most anxious to know, then, indeed, our sloth and carelessness in the divine service, although most unjust, would still be more tolerable. But go where you will in heaven and on earth, you will find no place that is hidden from the eye of God; we are in God; he is on all sides of us; in him we live, move, and have our being (Acts. 17: 28). He is looking at us while we are doing our work; he sees how we are doing it; he marks not only the outward movement of the hand, but also and chiefly the heart, the inward zeal, the intention with which we work. It is a source of joy and satisfaction to him to see a zealous servant, who is filled with a holy desire to please him, and is working diligently to that end; while the lazy, careless servant, who works against the grain, only fills him with disgust. This is evident enough from the terrible words of the Apocalypse, "I know thy works; that thou art neither cold nor hot," and because that is the character of them, I can stand them no longer: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth" (Apoc. 2 : 15, 16).

And really, whom does it most concern that we perform our daily duties with diligence, if not ourselves? God has nothing and wants nothing from them, except the fulfilment of his will and his outward glory; the whole merit of the work he leaves to us, and for us alone is the reward he has in store for eternity. The

more perfectly and diligently the work is done, the more pleasing it is in the sight of God ; and therefore the greater will be the merit and the reward due to it.

Most people are wanting in fervor, and therefore their works hardly profit them anything. Taking everything into account, there is great cry and little wool ; there are many ciphers and few figures ; many devotions, but little devotion. In truth, I might say that those duties that are so carelessly performed by most people are like idleness itself, and are nothing more than a waste of time, without merit or profit for the soul. And meanwhile we imagine that we are doing great things for God, heaping up riches and treasures in heaven, and living holy and pious lives, as Christians ought ! But we are grievously mistaken. The service of God does not consist in the multiplicity of works ; a few things done well are more for his honor and better for our souls than many things done in a perfunctory manner and imperfectly.

It is not enough to do *what* God wills, nor to do it *when* he wills ; but we must also do it *as* he wills, that is, we must perform all our duties with all possible diligence and true fervor of spirit. To act as you ought in this respect, say to yourselves before each work, no matter what it may be : this I am now about to do because my Lord and my God wishes me to do it ; I can do nothing more pleasing to him just now than this work ; he is present and is looking at me to see how I do it. Such a great God, who is worthy of all honor and love, is surely deserving that I should employ on this occasion all the zeal and fervor possible. Think also : a great deal depends for me on this work, and I can by means of it secure an immense reward in heaven ; is not that reward worth striving for ? But I shall lose it forever if I am careless or slothful now. Act as if on that one work depended all that is in heaven and on earth, and, indeed, the least iota of the honor and glory of God is to be preferred to all creatures in heaven and on earth. Act as if you had nothing but this one work to do, and therefore put out of your heads all thoughts of future occupations. Act as if this was the last thing you had to do, as if death were to come im-

mediately after, as might easily be the case, and you had to go into eternity, there to render to your strict Judge an account of all your thoughts, words, and actions. With such thoughts as these in your minds, how is it possible for you to perform your duties without proper zeal and diligence? Oh, if we could only realize what an immense profit we could make for our souls in a single day while we are in the state of sanctifying grace, what great Saints would we not become in the sight of God!

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE GOOD INTENTION IN OUR DAILY ACTIONS.

"*Seeing the city, he wept over it.*" *Luke* 19 : 41.

It must indeed have been a weighty matter that could draw tears from the eyes of Jesus. He foresaw not only the temporal destruction of the great city of Jerusalem, but the eternal ruin of the Jewish people. We, too, have reason to weep when we consider the manner of life that most Christians lead nowadays; nor am I now alluding merely to those who are in the state of sin, losing the precious time of grace and every day going nearer and nearer to hell, but also to those who are not given to great vices, and who, being in the state of grace, do what God wills them to do, and yet derive no fruit for their souls, although they have such splendid opportunities of acquiring immense and lasting riches, because they neglect the good intention in their daily actions. Hence,

Deplorable is the state of those who forget the good intention in their daily actions, for they thus cause the greatest loss to their souls.

If the good intention is not commanded under the pain of sin, yet it is but right to show that honor to God, for at least it does one no harm. "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do all to the glory of God" (1. Cor. 10 : 31). Mark the words "Whatsoever else you do," they admit of no exception. From

this we must conclude that God wishes to be honored in everything we do the whole day long ; but that we cannot do unless we direct our works to him by the good intention. It is but right and proper to direct all our actions to the honor and glory of God; for on the one hand God has every title to expect this from us, while on the other, it is a practice of the greatest utility to us, and when it is neglected we wilfully inflict great loss on our souls. I will confine myself to this last point. Tell me, O man, you who have different duties to perform every day in your state or occupation ; your head is full of many cares and anxieties, and your body wearied with many labors and difficulties ; will not that be the case with you whether you make the good intention or not? If you pay that honor to God, if you raise your mind to him and offer him all you do, will your care and trouble be greater on that account? No, indeed ; they will rather be considerably lessened. Will you derive less advantage from your actions? Will the good intention bring less profit to your household? Will it cause you to suffer loss in your temporal affairs? But will not your wares be just as valuable as before? Will not your master pay you just the same wages? Will not your services be repaid by the same food and salary? Can you not study or write as well as before? Certainly, and a great deal better. For, in recompense of the honor paid him, the good God will give you more help and grace. Will the good intention, perhaps, deprive your soul of some spiritual advantage? Will it render you less able to keep the commandments, or to conquer temptations to sin? Will you have less merit and reward in eternity to expect on account of it? Quite the contrary ; you will not suffer the least loss ; the whole work, its merit and its reward, is and remains yours ; nay, the merit and reward come from the good intention alone.

Not only do we lose nothing thereby, but on the other hand we rather inflict an irreparable injury on our souls when we neglect it. And in the first place, most of the acts we do in the day are neither good nor bad considered in themselves, neither praiseworthy nor culpable ; such, for example, as walking, standing, sit-

ting, seeing, hearing, speaking, eating, drinking, sleeping, playing, studying, reading, writing, buying, selling, suffering annoyances or trouble, and so forth. If all these things are done with a bad intention, they are all wicked and sinful; but no matter how trifling they are, if the good intention is not wanting, they become of such value that not all the riches of earth would be able to purchase them. Water, although its natural inclination is to run downwards, can be driven upwards by artificial means, as we see in fountains, in which the water is made to reach almost the height of the mountain from which it originally comes. In the same manner the most lowly duties we perform, the very meanest things we do, which in themselves savor only of the earth, can be so exalted by a supernatural end that they ascend to the highest heavens, and reach God himself, whom they merit as their eternal reward. Even the most lowly actions can be made valuable by the good intention. What more trivial act can there be than to give a cup of cold water to a thirsty man? And yet, if that is done with a good motive, hear what Christ himself says of it: "Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple: amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (Matt. 10: 42). What more common, nay, more carnal and animal-like, than to satisfy the stomach by eating and drinking? Yet if, according to the exhortation of St. Paul, that is done for the honor and glory of God, in order to preserve health for his service, it merits eternal joy in heaven.

By neglecting the good intention you deprive yourself of the eternal goods and merits of your soul, which you had almost in your hand, and which ought to be the reward of the good works you perform, such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, visiting the sick, burying the dead, and so on. If you do those things sometimes through habit, you imagine that you have done wonders; but if the good intention has been wanting, even holy works of that kind have not the least merit for eternity for your soul, and they all lose their holiness and worth when they are not performed with a supernatural motive. For, as St. Bernard says, "everything you

do is vanity, save and except what you do for God and in honor of God." Even to go to church and pray is no help to salvation, if the good intention is wanting. The Pharisee stood in the temple before the altar and prayed fervently: "O God, I give thee thanks. I fast twice in a week: I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18: 11, 12); and yet his prayer, as well as his rich alms, was rejected by the Lord as worthless, because he had not the right intention. "Why have we fasted, and thou hast not regarded?" such is the complaint the Israelites addressed to God; "why have we humbled our souls, and thou hast not taken notice?" But the Lord answered them by the prophet Isaias, saying: "Behold, in the day of your fast your own will is found" (Is. 58: 3). You fast and humble yourselves because it pleases you to do so, and not out of a pure intention of pleasing me. See, says St. Augustine, after citing many examples of that kind, see how God looks not to what man does, but to the motive for which he does it. We can sin and deserve eternal punishment if we do wilfully what we know to be forbidden under grievous sin, although we may not have a bad intention; but do good and merit heaven we cannot, although the work may be good and holy in itself, unless it proceeds from a good intention; for what is good must be so in all its circumstances.

How many works that we now look on as holy, will appear in quite different colors when the infallible Judge will examine them on that great day! Then we shall see to our astonishment that many a one will receive a beautiful crown who, while on earth, used to eat and drink well; and many another will have little or no reward, who used to fast and suffer hunger and thirst, because the former ate and drank with a good motive, while the latter did not direct his fasting to the honor of God. We shall see one who gave merely a farthing or a cup of cold water in charity, because he had nothing more to give, possess eternal riches; while another, who gave away many pounds to the poor, will be sent away empty-handed, because the former gave what he had to the poor of Christ with a good intention, but the latter, with all his almsgiving, had some

other motive in view, such as va nglory and a desire to be thought generous by men, or to get some work out of the poor whom he helped, that is, rather paying a fairly earned wage than giving alms. Then we shall see that many a one shall be condemned to hell on account of the alms he gave, because he bestowed them out of unjustly acquired property that he could have restored to its lawful owner, or because he had an unlawful motive in giving alms, such as enticing some person to have a sinful affection for him. Then we shall see what a great difference there will be between the rewards of two men who at the same time were present at the same devotion, heard the same sermon, or said the same prayers; one was animated by the desire to fulfil the will of God; the other was influenced by mere curiosity, and the wish to have his ears tickled, or to be seen by others.

Most people pass their lives in idleness and uselessly, not because they do evil, not because they omit doing good, but because they have not a pure intention in their actions. They live and hardly know why; they suffer, labor, run here and there, give themselves no end of trouble, and think of nothing but that they must do these things because their condition requires it, because they are compelled to do them. They seem to me to act like little children when they are sent on a message. You say to a little boy: Run off at once! and the boy runs away at full speed. Stop, I cry out to him; do you know where you are going? I am going to that house there, he says. But, I ask, do you know what you have to do when you get there? That's true, he answers; I don't know that. You must wait, then, till I tell you. So we often act. We run hither and thither like senseless children; we work, and neither know nor think for what purpose.

I conclude in the words of St. Paul, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God." Whatever you undertake, give God a share of it; do not forget the good intention. Nor must you be satisfied, as most people are, with merely saying in the morning, I offer up all my thoughts, words, and actions this day to the honor and glory of God. That is, indeed, a

good and praiseworthy habit; but that intention seldom holds good for the day, for if even a venial sin—and many of them are apt to be committed—if a venial sin, I say, that is contrary to that intention, creeps in, the intention is revoked and is of no value for the next action, so that it should be renewed often during the day, and especially at the beginning of each work. One of the hermits had this habit: whenever he began an action, he stood still for a short time, as if he was pondering on some weighty matter. Being asked why he did that, he said: How does the marksman act when he is about to shoot at the target? He shuts the left eye, and takes aim with the right, until he has caught the bull's eye; nor does he shoot until he has made sure of not missing his aim. That is what I do; I close the left eye; that is, I put away all vain and worldly thoughts, and direct my action to God, as the only end and aim I have in view, by the good intention, that I may not miss what I aim at. Nearly similar was the custom of the early Christians; before beginning anything they made the sign of the cross, as if to say: I do this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, that is, for God's sake. If we did the same on every occasion, what a rich treasure of merits we should store up for eternity! Nor do we require to stand still like the hermit, or to say long prayers. It is easy for us to approach God; there is not a moment in which he does not give audience; a single thought is all that is necessary.

Without a good intention you "walk round about," *e. g.*, you go round in a circle, like a horse in the tread-mill, who begins in the morning walking round and round in the wheel, and in the evening he is still going round in the same place, where he began in the morning, not a foot farther does he go because he goes round in a circle, and never gets farther than the circumference of it. So uselessly and wretchedly we spend our lives. We sow much and bring in little. We earn wages and put them into a bag with holes (Agg. 1 : 6). One day passes after another without profit, until death is at the door, and "the child shall die a hundred years old"

(Is. 45 : 20). We grow old in years, but(for the want of the good intention in our daily actions) are still babies in merit, when we journey into eternity. Amen.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

AVOIDING VAINGLORY IN OUR DAILY ACTIONS.

"I say to you, this man went down into his house justified rather than the other." *Luke* 18 : 14.

How different those two men entered into the temple, and how different they left it! What a diversity there is in the acts of the same two, and in the judgment of God upon those acts. The Pharisee's works were in themselves good and meritorious; but his boasting and vainglory so destroyed their value that they were worth nothing in the sight of God. The publican's works were in themselves bad and wicked; but by his humility he wiped out those works before God, and obtained grace from him. So much depends on the good intention by which we direct our actions to the honor and glory of God. Therefore there is nothing we should be more on our guard against in our actions than *vainglory* and *love of praise*, for that is the thief that steals away the merit of the holiest things we do, as I shall now show.

The glory that I am now speaking of consists in the appreciation and praise of men, namely, in this, that others when they see my actions, feel a secret gratification, and conceive a high opinion of me, wonder at what I do, and speak of me in terms of praise. It is called vainglory because it is a vain, deceitful, and useless thing that fades like the smoke before the wind. For either I do not know that men have such a good opinion of me and speak well of me; and in that case what better am I? Or else I do know of it, or see it or hear it; and even then what does it profit me? The good opinion or praise of others cannot either improve or damage what I have done. If the work is in itself un-

deserving of commendation, then the praise I receive for it is unjust, and I ought to be ashamed of it in my heart and soul. If the work appears to be commendable, even then the praise comes from men, who cannot see the workings of my heart nor the intention I had, and it is from that the whole goodness or wickedness of an action comes; consequently men cannot form a just judgment of the action.

If a skilful musician were to feel a secret gratification, and to boast and plume himself, because a dog hears his music and pricks up his ears at the sound of it; if a painter were to be proud of his picture because an ox passing by in the street happens to look at it, would not that be a vain, foolish, ridiculous love of praise? What does the dog know of music, or the ox of painting? Just as little do men understand of the virtue of another, because it is all interior, and cannot be recognized with certainty from any outward sign. How often do we not look on that which is really good and virtuous in itself as wicked and vicious, while, on the other hand, we regard that which is wicked and vicious as good and virtuous? How many hypocrites are Saints in the eyes of the world? how many Saints are held to be hypocrites? How many different opinions there were amonst the Jews regarding the holiness even of Jesus Christ himself, the Son of God! "And there was much murmuring among the multitude concerning him, for some said: he is a good man. And others said: No, but he seduceth the people. Others said: This is the Christ. But some said: Doth the Christ come out of Galilee? So there arose a dissension among the people because of him" (John 7: 12, 41, 43). See how different the judgments of those men who at the same time heard the same doctrine from the lips of Christ, and saw the wonderful works and miracles he performed. Is it not, then, a vain and foolish thing to pride one's self and take pleasure in praise that comes from ignorant men?

And from men, moreover, who nearly always pronounce judgment and speak of others according to their own passions and fancies. He who loves me sincerely and wishes well to me will

praise and approve of everything I do. He who hates me will not be able to see any good in me: he will condemn and find fault with all my actions. The proud man esteems nothing worthy of praise but what he does himself. The simple-minded man wonders at everything he has not seen before. Even the greatest and noblest actions of others are like a splinter in the eye of the envious man. The flatterer, who praises me to my face and congratulates me, despises me and treats me with contempt behind my back. Thus each one looks at an action in the light shed upon it by his own passions. A judgment of that kind we cannot, of course, rely on.

Finally, the glory we seek from men exists mostly in our own fancy and imagination. We say to ourselves sometimes: Oh, what I am now doing is sure to be approved of by people; many will certainly wonder at it. But in reality people only laugh at and turn it into ridicule. A vain woman, who dresses beyond her station, and struts down the street in the latest fashions, imagines that the eyes of all are turned towards her with admiration, and that people are saying of her: See how beautifully she is dressed! She must be of a noble family. Yes, they talk of her by all means, and look at her with wonder, if you wish; but their talk and their wonder consist only in sarcasm and ridicule. Fie upon her! they exclaim; see how she marches down the street, as if we did not know where she comes from, nor what she is worth! What a vain, deceitful, unprofitable, nay, often disgraceful thing it is that they seek who strive to gain the praise of men! He who is greedy of praise can well be called a liar, for he lies to himself, since he imagines that he possesses some excellence which he really has not; or else he thinks that men respect and esteem him, when in reality their feeling towards him are of the contrary description.

But is it, then, pride and vanity to do a good action in presence of others? Or is it wicked and sinful? God forbid! Otherwise the Saviour of the world would have made a mistake in warning us to give good and edifying example: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works,

and glorify your Father, who is in heaven" (Matt. 5 : 16). Therefore we may allow men to see our good works, that they may thereby be encouraged to honor and praise God in heaven, from whom all that is good and praise-worthy comes as from its source. To do good in presence of others, when I foresee that they will think highly of me, and conceive an esteem for me, and speak in my praise, is that pride and vanity, and a sin? And if they really have a good opinion of me, and speak highly of what I do—nay, if they praise me to my face—is that a sin for me? No, not at all. As long as I give the whole honor and praise to him to whom alone they belong, that is, to the Lord God, it is a meritorious work. But to seek praise or esteem from men, or to rejoice in it, or extol myself on account of it, as if it belonged to me by right, that is the vice of vainglory. That sin can be committed *in the beginning of a work*: if, namely, I undertake anything that I may please men, or, earn their esteem or praise; this is clearly contrary to a good supernatural intention and spoils the whole work, because I make the good opinion of men the whole end and object of it. It can be committed *during the work*, although the work may have been begun with a good intention for God's sake; if, namely, I think or imagine that it will please men, and win their esteem for me, and I continue to act with this motive. In this way the good intention is retracted and the goodness of the action interrupted. It can also be committed *after the work*, if I remember what I have done with self-complacency, and have a vain pleasure and joy in the praises I receive for it. By this the work is not destroyed in itself, nor is its merit lessened; yet the sin of vainglory is committed.

II. However it be committed, vainglory is the thief that steals away the merit from the holiest actions.

1. For, in the first place, while I am actually engaged in doing a service pleasing to God, I am taking from him what belongs to him, and what he values most and has specially reserved for him-

self. St. Gregory compares vainglory to a thief who offers his company to a traveller, pretending that he is going the same way whiling away the time meanwhile by pleasant conversation ; but when the traveller feels most secure, the thief robs him of all his money. So do we act towards our Lord and God whenever we seek the vain praise of men in our actions ; we accompany God through courtesy, as it were, under the pretext of doing him an acceptable service ; and meanwhile we rob him of his property. How so ? There are two things in every good work : the *honor and praise* that belong to it, and the *usefulness or merit* of it, which latter consists in the increase of sanctifying grace during this life, and eternal glory in the next. This merit God leaves to us, but under the condition that we give the praise to him alone ; just as a celebrated painter willingly gives to another the picture he has painted, first taking the precaution of writing his name under it, so that all may know it is his work ; thus we see on some pictures the words, *Apelles pinxit, Rubens pinxit.* Or as two merchants make an agreement with each other in business to enter into partnership, the one contributing the money, the other taking on himself all the trouble of management : at stated times they settle their accounts, and divide the profits according to arrangement ; neither of them takes all the money that has been made.

My dear brethren, we carry on a business, so to speak, with the almighty God, and the principal thing we have to look to is our eternal salvation as the greatest gain we can make ; neither God alone nor man alone carries on this business ; it is the affair of both together. God supplies all the means of carrying it on, for it is by his help and grace that we are able to do good ; man gives his labor and diligence. Now, whatever profit is made must be divided between God and man ; God is satisfied with the honor alone, and that he will not consent to give to any one, as he assures us by the prophet Isaias : "I, the Lord, this is my name : I will not give my glory to another" (Is. 13 : 8). And St. Paul says : " To the king of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever" (1. Tim. 1 : 17). But all

the other proceeds of the business, namely, the increase of sanctifying grace and eternal happiness of heaven that follows thereon, God gives to man. Now he who wishes to take to himself what belongs to God, and to keep the honor of the actions, acts unjustly towards God and deserves to have the whole agreement cancelled, to be deprived of all shares in the profits, and therefore to lose all merits.

2. Another reason why even the holiest works and occupations are deprived of all their merit before God when they are performed through vainglory is that the supernatural intention is wanting, since it is nullified by seeking the praise of men. It is the intention that gives worth and merit to our actions; if it is wanting, all the rest is of no value, as Christ says: "The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome" (Matt. 6 : 22, 23). By the eye here is understood the intention, by which we consider beforehand, and as it were foresee, what we wish to do; by the body is understood the work, which follows the intention as the body follows the direction of the eye. Our Lord wishes to show that all actions take their light, their appearance, from the intention with which we perform them. If the latter is good, then the work, provided it is not forbidden, must also be good; if it is bad, then the work, too, must be bad; if the end to which the intention directs the act be perfect, then the work is one of perfection. This is what St. Paul means when he writes to the Romans: "For if the first fruit be holy, so is the lump also; and if the root be holy, so are the branches" (Rom. 11 : 16). According to the root, so is the tree and its fruits; if the root is rotten and corrupt, the tree can bear only worm-eaten, bad fruit; the fresher and healthier the root, the better the fruit. So also the goodness and holiness of actions consist in the intention as in their root; the better and holier that intention is, the more perfect and pleasing to God will the work be.

St. Paul speaking of charity and sanctifying grace, without

which all good works are dead and of no help for salvation, says: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal; and if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge; and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1. Cor. 13 : 1, 2, 3). That is, if I am not in the state of grace while doing all these good works, they will not help me to heaven; they are and will remain dead works as long as they are not vivified by grace. The same words of the Apostle may be used almost without change when speaking of the good intention in our actions. If I fasted all the days of my life on bread and water; if I actually took the bread out of my own mouth to give to the poor out of Christian charity; if I helped all the sick in the hospitals and visited prisoners with the greatest kindness and attention; if I spent day and night in constant prayer and mortifications; if I wearied myself going about the world converting heathens, heretics, and sinners; nay, if I performed all imaginable good works, but have not the good intention by which they should be directed to a supernatural end, it profiteth me nothing: they are of no use to my eternal salvation. And if I have, moreover, a bad intention, so that those works, otherwise good and holy in themselves, are directed to a bad end, they are turned into sinful and wicked actions.

3. Finally, if vainglory left our works as good and holy as they are in themselves, yet they would not have any merit or reward in heaven. Why? Because he who acts with such unworthy motives renounces the eternal reward, and seeks something else as the fruit of his labor, namely, the esteem, praise, and applause of men, which often exist merely in his own imagination; therefore, since he has no right to expect to be paid twice for the same work, he cannot hope for any other recompense from God, for

whose honor and glory the work was not performed. This is according to the express words of our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew. "Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them; otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 6 : 1, 2). And when he speaks of the hypocrites in the synagogues of the Jews, who caused the trumpet to be sounded before them in the public streets, and then gave rich alms to the poor, that they might be honored by men, he adds this terrible sentence : "Amen I say to you, they have received their reward," that is, the admiration and esteem of the people which they sought for by their alms-giving. Again, speaking of the hypocrites, "that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the street, that they may be seen by men" (Matt. 6 : 5), he pronounces the same sentence : "Amen I say to you, they have received their reward."

Poor mortal, whoever you may be, who seek for the praise of men in your actions, all your works of piety, your public prayers, holy Communions, alms-giving, visiting the sick, attending processions, hearing sermons, the good advice you give others, and by which perhaps you have brought many to heaven—all that has already received its reward. Your wish was to make a great name for yourself before the world, to be looked on as pious and holy, to be praised, esteemed, thought much of ; very well, says God, who knows the depths of your heart, very well, then, be it done as you wish. Flatter yourself with the idea that you have secured what you so long for ; imagine that the world wonders at your extraordinary works, and holds a high opinion of you. Take your reward and go ; I can do nothing more for you ; you have already received what you sought for. If you ask me to reward you in eternity for those works, I will answer you in the words that Abraham spoke to the rich man who was tortured in hell, and asked him for a drop of water to cool his tongue : "Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy life-time" (Luke 16 : 25). Heavenly glory is the reward I give for those good works that have not been paid for in time, and which still

can claim a price; but you have already received payment, and now you must be satisfied.

Ah, Christians, what a miserable, wretched, unhappy payment that is! Must he not be foolish, nay, stone-blind, who seeks for the empty sound of human praise and acts through vainglory while by the very same works he loses an eternal treasure in heaven? Poor, blind, and miserable man, you are indeed a very bad merchant and man of business. You are like the wild Indians who in days gone by used to give away their gold and silver ornaments for a few needles, or beads, or tobacco-pipes. But you are even more foolish, for you exchange the good works by which you may purchase heaven for the vain, imaginary, useless praise of men. Like the dog in the fable, you snap at the shadow, and thereby lose the solid piece of meat that you really had possession of; like the spider, you make a web out of your own entrails to catch a miserable fly.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE SIGN OF VAINGLORY, AND THE MEANS OF GUARDING AGAINST IT.

"*He hath done all things well.*" *Mark* 7 : 37.

Such praise cannot be given to any one during this life, for a vain, deceitful, useless thing is the praise that comes from men who are ignorant of what they say and are blinded by passion, so that they cannot form a correct judgment; but the beauty of that praise consists in its being given by God after this life. Who of us will dare to assert that those words, "he hath done all things well," can be said of himself with truth? To do everything well is *to do all that God wills us to do*, to do it *when God wills, as God*

wills, and *because God wills*. Ah, how often we are wanting in these points! What are we to do in this regard? We must study

I. The signs whereby we may detect whether we are given to vainglory and are apt to be influenced by human respect in our actions;

II. The means to be used against this vice, so that we may perform all our works with a pure intention for God alone.

I. Amongst all the vices there is none *so common, so subtle, so hidden and secret* as vainglory. None more *common*, I say; for where is the man alive who can say that he was never assailed by it, and that he never yielded to it in the least? Where is the man who does not sometimes wish and seek to be honored and praised by others? Where is the man who has not at least a secret pleasure in such praise? who does not rejoice in his heart when he sees that his actions are admired and applauded by others? Whoever he is who can say that of himself with truth, he is indeed a great man. When Satan brought our Lord to the pinnacle of the temple, and said, "if thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down" (Matt. 4 : 6), the evil spirit thought that vainglory might conquer him, whom gluttony failed to conquer. He wished to persuade our Lord to fly through the air, that the people might see and admire him. In this the tempter hoped to succeed with our Lord as he had with many others; for he knew well by experience that those who cannot be caught in any other way often allow themselves to be deceived by vainglory. For it is not an easy thing, not to be tickled by the praise and applause of men. In a word, all men condemn vainglory as an abominable vice; all are ashamed to be looked on as vain; nevertheless there is hardly one in the world who does not suffer more or less from this malady.

It is a most *subtle* vice, for it can creep in unawares anywhere; for example, if I fast as I ought, and observe the rules of temperance, I am assailed by idle self-complacency, inasmuch as I imagine that I will be looked on as holy. If I eat and drink and enjoy myself, so as not to be considered scrupulous, I seek to gain a good

name among the children of the world, as one who knows how to live and to get on with people. If I am well dressed, vainglory suggests that I am looked on as rich and noble; if I am dressed poorly or modestly, according to the rules of the Gospel, I am assailed by the thought that I shall be considered as one who despises the world. If I speak eloquently and in fitting terms of a subject, I am in immediate danger of being overcome by vanity, because I shall pass among those who are listening to me as learned and talented ; if I keep silent and say nothing of things that I am not ignorant of, my silence will be esteemed prudence. No matter what I do, I am never safe from the attacks of this crafty and cunning foe. Nay, even the contempt of honors, the avoiding of idle praise and reputation, the humiliation and abasement of myself, cannot protect me from the risk I run by acquiring a name for humility, which is the most beautiful of the Christian virtues and the one most necessary for a holy life.

Often a rich and noble gentleman, with all his wealth and magnificence, is not so self-complacent as a poor hermit in his rags, because the latter imagines that he is trampling the pride of the world under foot ; a noble lady has sometimes less pride in her splendid apparel than the poor peasant girl in the coarse, blue apron and new woolen gown with which she comes to church on Sundays and holy-days to let herself be admired. Not without reason does our Lord warn us in the Gospel : "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6: 19. 20). Nevertheless vainglory manages to get at the treasures that we had laid up in heaven by our good works, when on account of those works we give way to pride and look down on others.

Finally, vainglory is a *secret* and *most hidden* vice ; it attacks us before we are aware of it ; we seek the praise of men, and hardly know that we are doing so. If the vice is of such a nature that it can creep unawares into our works, how are we to know that we

are given to it, and that we seek the praise of men in our ordinary actions?

1. The first and most certain sign of this malady is *boasting*, when one loves to speak of the good actions he has performed. We have an example of it in the Pharisee who stood before the altar and there boasted of his fasting and almsgiving. The Pharisee did not lie; nay, he told the truth about himself; for he really fasted twice a week and gave tithes of all he possessed; but every one that exalteth himself offends, although he speaks the truth; for, though the Pharisee was in a better state than the publican when he entered the temple, he went out condemned. There are people who, when they get scent of the least thing that is to their praise, cannot keep it silent, but must out with it to every one they meet; I was there at the time, they say; I did this or that; I managed the matter in this way; so-and-so has to thank me for his success; if those people had not taken my advice, they would not have done so well. If I had been there, I should have managed matters differently; if that person had done what I suggested, he would be better off now, and so on. This is an evident sign that one does not seek the glory of God, but his own glory from men. The same boasting can be done in silence; if, namely, he who says nothing of what he does nevertheless is pleased that men should know of it and admire him for it; they are like children who, when they have a new coat or new shoes, cannot bear to be kept in the house; no, they are all anxiety to rush out into the street and let people see the fine things they have on.

2. The second sign of vainglory and a perverse intention in our actions is to *spy out the judgments and opinions of men, and see how we have pleased them*. To run down what we do, as is often the case, and then have a secret pleasure in hearing others approve of it, but to be dissatisfied when they condemn it; to excuse in all sorts of ways what they find fault with, throwing the blame on something else off ourselves, or else obstinately defending our

mode of action ; fearing the hostile opinion of men, or doing out of respect for it some good work with the intention of pleasing them. All this comes from secret pride, vanity, and thirst of praise. He who seeks nothing but God and his glory cares little for the opinion of men ; let them think and say what they will, he says, I will do what God wills me to do ; whether men approve of it or not matters nothing to me ; I did not begin the act on their account, nor will I omit it for them. I require no other witness or approver of my works than the all-seeing God, to whom my heart and conscience are known ; if I please him, I am satisfied, and have attained the end I work for.

3. The third sign of vainglory is *to feel a secret envy* when others are placed on an equality with us in the same works, arts, or sciences, or when they show more cleverness than we ; to be dissatisfied if we cannot do as well as others ; to wish and desire that we should excel all in a certain thing. This envy causes us to feel disappointed when others are praised, to speak very sparingly in praise of them, or, when possible, to belittle them and talk contemptuously of them. This is again an evident sign that we do not seek God alone in our actions, but rather fear that by the praise others get we may lose something of the good opinion of men.

4. The fourth sign of vainglory is to be down-hearted and troubled when our work is a failure in the eyes of the world, and has not the success we hoped for. He who serves God with a pure intention does not trouble himself about that ; for he thinks to himself, I have done my part ; if I fail to attain the end I work for, it is not my fault ; God has not commanded me to succeed ; he has merely told me what to do. We must keep in the dispositions which the holy Angels have with regard to those who are entrusted to their charge. They exhort and advise them faithfully ; they guard, watch over, and encourage them to good, and do their utmost to bring them to heaven ; but if their charges unfortunately make a bad use of their free will, all the good advice and exhorta-

tions are neglected, and the unhappy ones hurry on to eternal ruin. But the Angels feel no chagrin on that account, nor are they a whit less happy ; they say, as the angel in the prophecy of Jeremias : "We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed : let us forsake her, and let us go every man to his own land ;" for, in spite of that, "The Lord hath brought forth our justices" (Jer. 51 : 9, 10). St. James, when he was in Spain, did not convert more than eight or nine persons to the true faith, in spite of all his labors, while the other Apostles converted whole kingdoms ; must we think therefore that his reward was less ? No, the Lord received with equal joy him who made ten talents of five, and him who made four of two ; for he does not consider the greatness of the gain, but the intention of the will. He does not so much look at the result of the work as at the work itself and the intention with which it is performed.

5. The fifth sign of vainglory is, when we perform our ordinary actions with more fervor, zeal, and devotion *when others are present than when we are alone.* In this we act like beggars ; when they see any one coming, they weep and cry out at the top of their voices ; when they are alone they are quite still. So, too, there are some servants who are very diligent when any one is looking at them ; but if they are left alone in the house, they idle their time away. He who tries to please God with a pure intention finds reason enough for employing all his fervor and zeal in the fact that the all-seeing eye of God is looking at every motion of his heart.

II. Twofold is the origin of vainglory ; the first concerns *our understanding and imagination,* inasmuch as we are apt to think highly of what we find out, do, and effect, and to look on it as worthy of praise. The second concerns *our will* with which we arrogate to ourselves the imaginary praise due to our works, and hunt for it eagerly.

1. As far as the understanding and imagination are concerned, the first means of avoiding vainglory is often and deeply to ponder

on *what we are, where we come from,* what *we have of ourselves* and *can do of ourselves.* Of myself I am nothing; of myself I have nothing; of myself I know nothing; by myself I can do nothing. All that I am, and have, and know, and can do, comes from God alone. All the evil I have done, still do, and shall do in the future, certainly deserves neither honor nor praise, but rather shame and confusion before God and man. If I consider the good I have done in the past, I have more reason for saying than holy Job had: "I feared all my works, knowing that thou didst not spare the offender" (Job 9 : 28). For I find that the most of them were tainted with carelessness, pride, vainglory, dislike, wilful distractions, and other faults and imperfections which accompanied them; so that I have reason enough to humble myself on account of them and to be ashamed before God and the world. If I deserve to be punished even for my good acts, what have I to be proud of, or why should I think much of myself? And what I have done, am doing, or shall do without any faults creeping in is an alms that God generously bestows on me quite gratuitously, and I am bound to implore that alms of him like a poor beggar in fervent daily prayer, and further, as his debtor, I must return him heartfelt thanks for his goodness; for it is he alone who can help me to do good. "For without me you can do nothing" (John 15 : 5), says our Lord.

From all this we must conclude that, if we have anything great or praiseworthy in the shape of natural or supernatural gifts, or if we do any great or praiseworthy action before men or privately, not the smallest particle of honor or glory is due to us on that account, but all belongs to God alone, from whom we have received the gifts and by whose help we have performed the actions. Would it not be foolish for a beggar who is admitted into a strange house through pity, fed at a strange table, clothed with the garments of some one else, although the house, the food, and the clothing may be very fine and magnificent—would it not be foolish for the beggar to boast of all those things, and to think a great deal of himself on account of them? Must he not still confess

himself to be a poor, needy man, who is dependent on the charity of his benefactor for food, clothing, and shelter, and who, if left to himself, would have to go about the streets naked and hungry? Would it not be foolish for one who is building a house with other people's money to boast about the fine building? Poor fool, you might say to him, what are you thinking of? You have not given a single stone to that house. It requires no great art to pay with other people's money, or to build at another man's expense. Would it not be foolish for one who seems to be rich, but who is really head and ears in debt, in debt for his clothes, for the bread he eats, in debt to his butcher, his shoemaker, and his workmen—debts that he is bound to pay but has not the means of paying—would it not be foolish for him to boast of his riches, which in reality are nothing but debts? So must I and all men, whoever they are, think; if I have any praiseworthy quality, it is an alms that God has gratuitously bestowed on me through sheer mercy; if I do anything praiseworthy, it is a building for which God pays; all my natural or supernatural gifts of soul and body, all my good actions, all temporal and eternal goods that I possess, are debts that I have incurred with God, that I must pay, that I shall never be able to repay in full and for which I can only return him humble thanks; therefore I would indeed act like a fool if I were to have the least good opinion of myself on account of such things. I must rather acknowledge that not the least praise or honor is due to me.

2. If we stop up this first spring, the other will soon empty itself; that is, after this heartfelt confession on the part of the understanding, the will must necessarily surrender and acknowledge that, unless it wishes to act wickedly, it must never arrogate to itself any praise, but give all the praise and honor to God under all circumstances; and this is the second means of conquering vainglory. First, we must always at the beginning, middle, and end of all our actions hold fast to this intention with the prophet David: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name give

glory" (Ps. 113: 1). Secondly when we have performed a praiseworthy action, we must return humble thanks to God, to show that we did it not of ourselves, but by his help. Thirdly, when we are praised by men for our actions, when they talk well of us and honor us, we must imagine that what they say is not for us, but that they are speaking of God; that their words of praise are not directed to us but to God, whom we represent for the time being; and we must say to ourselves: if you mean that for me, you are doing an injustice and are very much mistaken, for it is not I who did the action, but the almighty God who did it by me. Just as, when one says: what a beautiful pen has written that! what a skilful brush has painted that picture! what a practised hammer has made that work of art! the lifeless tools are never alluded to, although it seems that the whole talk is of them; but in reality the praise is intended for the writer, the painter, the artist who made use of those tools. Hence the will, if it does not wish to act wrongfully and to fall into a mistake, must give all the honor and glory to God whenever it is praised or is otherwise attacked by vainglory.

3. The third means that concerns the will against vainglory is the good intention that we should make every morning and renew frequently during the day, protesting before God and heaven that in all our actions we seek only his honor and glory. If after that I am tempted to a vain thought, I can laugh at it and say to it: ah, poor fool! you come too late; another has been here before you, and to him I have given all my works and the glory that comes from them: "To God alone be honor and glory." The last and most necessary means against vainglory is constant prayer to God for a pure intention and an upright heart in all our actions, saying daily with St. Augustine: "My God, grant me to know thee and to know myself, that I may love thee and despise myself!"

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

DOING THE WILL OF GOD EXACTLY IN ALL THINGS.

"*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.*" *Luke* 10: 27.

Love does not consist merely *in words*, in saying, I love you. Nor does it consist in the heart alone, in wishing well to a person. True, sincere love must show itself *in work*, namely in doing what we know will please the object of our love, and in abstaining from what we know would displease him. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart." You must love the Lord your God, therefore you must do what you know to be pleasing to him. But remember, too, that you must love him with your whole heart, not with half of it; with your whole soul, not with half of it; with all your strength, not with half of it merely; and with all your mind not separating the least act of it from the love of God. Therefore you must do all that the Lord God wishes you to do, and you must abstain from all that is dipleasing to him, and that he does not wish you to do. There are gross faults committed in this way even by many who appear to be good and holy, and who fulfil the will of God in many things, though not in all; here and there is something small that we keep for ourselves in which we do not wish to do the will of God; here and there we keep something small for ourselves that God does not wish us to do, and that we do not wish to give up. It may be a trifling thing, but it is enough to interrupt the union and harmony of our will with the will of God; nor can the soul that does not fulfil the known will of God, even in the smallest thing, please him. To deter still more all here present from this hateful manner of dealing with God, I now say-

Not to fulfil the known will of Goa, even in the smallest things, is very dangerous.

God has prepared many great chastisements and calamities,

both for soul and body, and has decreed from all eternity that they should be the punishment of all transgressions, even those that seem very small, against his holy law ; so that he who acts against the will of God in this or that small matter, as we call it, or who neglects to fulfil the known will of God, brings down on himself those punishments, and sometimes, too, thus makes a beginning of his eternal ruin ; not, indeed, that a small offence deserves the pains of hell, but because by a just decree and permission of the Almighty those small things are followed by more serious faults, which entail everlasting death and damnation on the soul. Hence if you experience a slight perturbation of mind, do not despise it because it is slight, but consider what great harm it does you. We often think and say ; this or that is a small thing ; it does not matter whether I do the will of God in this particular or not. But I say, although they are small, trivial, insignificant things, yet they are at the same time very dangerous. Do not despise small sins, but reflect on the injury they do.

How often do we not read in the holy Scriptures, as we actually experience in daily life, that God allows great, monstrous, terrible crimes to go unpunished in this life ; nay, that, when they have been repented of, he forgets them forever, while he punishes the small faults and transgressions even of his holiest servants very severely, in order to warn us that we must not deliberately go against his holy will even in the most trifling things ? King David had been guilty of a shameful adultery with Bethsabee, he had murdered the innocent Urias, and he spent a whole year in the guilt of those two sins without repentance, aye, even without thinking of God, from whom he had received so many benefits. Who would look on the premature death of David's little son as sufficient atonement for such sins ? And yet the prophet Nathan, after having represented to David in a parable the crime he had committed, and received his humble acknowledgment of guilt in the words, "I have sinned against the Lord"(2. Kings 12 : 13),announced to him as the sole punishment of his crime : "Thou shalt not die ;" but, "because thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme,

for this thing the child that is born to thee shall surely die" (2. Kings 12 : 14). On the other hand, when the same David had counted his people (by which act he did not the least injury to any one, for he acted, seemingly at least, as a king ought for the good of his subjects—and in any case, he was guilty of nothing worse than a sin of vanity, which he at once repented of as soon as he thought of what he had done : "I have sinned very much in what I have done ; but I pray thee, O Lord, to take away the iniquity of thy servant, because I have done exceeding foolishly)"(2. Kings 24: 10), what followed this act of vanity ? It was announced to him in the name of God by Nathan that he had to choose one of three evils, either a seven years' famine, or three months' persecution from his enemies, or three days' pestilence among his people ; and as David humbly resigned himself into the hands of God, choosing the latter punishment, "there died of the people from Dan to Bethsabee seventy thousand men"(2. Kings 24 : 15).

Aaron, the high-priest, had sinned grievously against God in the absence of Moses by making for the people a golden calf, which they adored as the true God, amid dancing and singing, eating and drinking ; yet we do not read that the least punishment was inflicted on him, or that he was threatened in any way on account of that gross breach of duty. But when the same Aaron, with Moses his brother, was guilty of not perfectly fulfilling the will of God (he had merly doubted for a moment whether striking the rock with the rod he held in his hand would cause the water to flow from it, according to the promise God had made him, which was only a venial sin on his part), how terribly he and his brother had to expiate their fault ! "Because you have not believed me, to sanctify me before the children of Israel, you shall not bring these peoples into the land which I will give them" (Num. 20: 12). Therefore he was excluded from the Promised Land and died on Mount Hor. For the Lord said again to Moses : "Let Aaron go to his people : for he shall not go into the land which I have given the children of Israel, because he was incredulous to my words at the waters of contradiction" (Num. 20: 24). You must bring

Aaron, and his son to Mount Hor, and there having stripped the father of his vesture, you shall put it on his son Eleazar, in the sight of the multitude. "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, and die there" (Num. 20: 26), a sentence that was at once carried into execution.

Josias, one of the holiest of kings, perished miserably in battle. Why? What wrong had he done? Because he did not believe a heathen, barbarous king, who had announced to him in the name of God that he should not fight against him. The unfortunate Oza (who can think of it without a shudder?) merely put out his hand to support the tottering ark, and prevent it from falling. Was that, then, such a great crime that it deserved the punishment of death? Yet it was actually punished in that way; Oza fell dead on the spot. Lot's wife only looked around when she was flying with her family from Sodom. (Is it indeed such a rare thing for a woman to give away to curiosity? Is it not a thing that happens every day, even in church, before the altar, at the Communion rail, when God is about to be received in the Blessed Sacrament, an act that should certainly be performed with the greatest humility and reverence? What more common than to look about to see who is coming in and how they are dressed, even while the lips are still moving in prayer?) And yet (woe to us if God were to be so strict with us!) that little act of curiosity was so displeasing to God, since he had strictly forbidden it, that the woman was at once turned into a pillar of salt.

But all those punishments were only temporal, and affected the body and its life. If we are free from such chastisements, there is great reason to fear much worse may be in store for us, which will affect the immortal soul and its eternal salvation. And here again I ask, who can explain the wonderful and inscrutable judgments of God, and why he sometimes allows the holiest and most devout souls to fall into the most abominable vices, nay, to die impenitent and be lost forever? If we could see the cause of it, we should find it to be that those sins, and the impenitence and damnation that were their consequence, came originally from slight

acts of disobedience and neglecting the known will of God. Where did the adultery and murder come from that David, that man after God's own heart, committed? From a slight sin of curiosity that he was guilty of by not mortifying his eyes. What was the cause of the abominable idolatry and hardness of heart of the wise Solomon? Vainglory. I shudder when I read of the fearful fate of king Saul. At first he was, "a choice and goodly man, and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he" (1. Kings 9 : 2). But what became of him at last, and what was the cause of the temporal and eternal misery into which he fell? A single act of disobedience, seemingly an unimportant one, by which he neglected to fulfil the will of God. After he had been consecrated king, he wished to offer sacrifice to the Lord, and Samuel told him on the part of God to go on before him to Galgal, and there to await his arrival, promising to come on the seventh day and to offer sacrifice. Saul went on ; the seventh day passed by, but there was no sign of Samuel, while Saul was surrounded by his powerful enemies, the Philistines. What was he to do in such circumstances? Both armies were ready for battle; his soldiers began to murmur and threaten to leave him ; he dared not confront such a foe without having first offered sacrifice; everything was prepared, and Samuel had not yet come. At last Saul himself undertook the office of priest, which in the Old Law was permitted to anointed kings; and as he afterwards confessed, he did so out of sheer necessity. Considering all the circumstances Saul was not guilty of a mortal sin in this act of disobedience ; and yet, what was the consequence of it? Samuel came up when he had completed the sacrifice, and said to him : "What hast thou done? Unhappy man, how hast thou forgotten thy duty! Thou hast done foolishly, and hast not kept the commandments of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee. And if thou hadst not done this, the Lord would have now established thy kingdom over Israel forever, but thy kingdom shall not continue" (1. Kings 13 : 13, 14). But the loss of his throne and kingdom was not the greatest he had to suffer, for he lost his soul as well. To protect his

crown he persecuted the innocent David, cruelly put to death all the priests who gave him shelter, and fell from one vice into another, until at last he put an end to himself in despair.

Again, the cause of the lamentable fall of Peter, and of his thrice denying with an oath that he knew our Lord, was nothing else but the too great confidence he had in his own virtue, and the boast he made of it before the other disciples: "And Peter, answering, said to him: Although all shall be scandalized in thee, I will never be scandalized" (Matt. 26 : 33). Was it not to Teresa, the seraphic virgin full of divine love, and chosen spouse of Christ, that God showed the place prepared for her in hell, unless she abstained from certain small faults to which she was addicted? Not, indeed, that those faults in themselves deserved hell fire; but because the just God, in punishment of her disobedience in small things, would have refused her the special graces without which she could not avoid great sins, so that she would have died impenitent, and been hurled into hell. If Teresa had continued to commit those small faults, saying to herself, as we unfortunately do: Oh, it does not matter much; a little holy water will soon clear me of those sins—she would not now be a great saint in heaven, but would be among the demons in hell. So important is it for us to be most exact in doing the will of God even in small things.

Since, then, my dear brethren, we are assured by the Holy Scriptures that the greatest evils of body and soul, nay, eternal damnation, can arise from small transgressions, according to the inscrutable decrees of the Almighty for each individual; and since we know not what evil may arise for our souls from this or that small matter, which we think little of, although we know that it is displeasing to God, and refuse to mortify ourselves in it—it must then be very dangerous to do the least thing wilfully that we know to be contrary to the divine will. Who knows what God has determined with regard to us, what great graces he is prepared to give us, to what glory he will raise us in heaven, provided we only obey him in this or that seemingly small matter? If we do

not obey, we deliberately disturb the order fixed by him, deprive ourselves of those graces, and bring, we now know not, what harm on our souls. We know nothing about this now, but we shall see it clearly on that great day when we shall have to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. Oh, what a small thing it was, the elect will exclaim, on which our salvation depended! If we had neglected it during our lifetime, how would things go with us now? If we had not obeyed the will of God in those small things, the whole chain of our predestination would have been broken. On the other hand, the reprobate will cry out: Ah, what a small thing it was that caused us to lose our souls! That trifle that we neglected; that habit of lying; that talkativeness about the faults of others; that curiosity of the eyes; that vanity in dress, which we have either indulged in ourselves or else permitted to our children; that human respect, that desire to please men, in which we refused to overcome ourselves; that sloth that kept us from going to hear Mass and sermons; the habit of losing our time in unnecessary conversations, by which we neglected the duties of our state; that known truth which we did not observe for the sake of pleasing God—that was the first cause of our ruin; that trifle, as it appeared to me, closed the spring of grace; that was the beginning of the mortal sins we afterwards committed; that was the first link of the chain that dragged us down to hell.

And now you will doubtless say: if such is the case, if my eternal salvation or damnation depends on the observance or fulfilment of the will of God in small things, then, indeed, we must always walk most carefully, and avoid the least wilful fault. Eyes, ears, tongue, and our other senses we must always keep guard over, lest they should come across something that would be even a remote occasion of sin to them. We must be suspicious of everything that could be in the least displeasing to God, and avoid it at once; nor must we allow the smallest inspiration of God to go by unprofited of. But how many are there who will make that resolution? How many who will keep it? They who do so must live in quite a different manner from that which is

common in the world. And what a melancholy affair life will then be!

True, my dear brethren, your first assertion I cannot deny: "He that feareth God neglecteth nothing" (Eccles. 7 : 19); he who fears God and loves him sincerely will neglect not even the smallest thing that belongs to his service. Such, too, is the exhortation given us by St. Peter: "Wherefore, brethren, labor the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election; for doing these things, you shall not sin at any time" (2 Pet. 1 : 10). Is not the God of infinite beauty worth that we should do all he wills, and carefully avoid acting against his will in anything? Is heaven not worth that trouble? Not worth all the pains we take to gain it during this short and uncertain life? To this our Lord himself expressly exhorts us in the Gospel of St. Luke, when he says: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate; for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able" (Luke 13 : 24).

2. Your second assertion, that few men live in that way, is unfortunately only too true, also; and therefore we read: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. Narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are that find it!" (Matt. 7 : 13, 14.) Truly, we must live differently from the manner which now prevails in the world if we wish to please God and place our souls in safety. "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him" (1. John 2 : 15). "Know you not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world becometh an enemy of God" (James 4 : 10). "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive" (John 14 : 16, 17), because my Spirit cannot exist with the spirit of the world and its vain usages. Therefore you must live in the world as if the world were nothing to you.

3. Your last assertion, that a life of this kind must be a melan-

choly one, is not at all true ; the contrary is the truth. For no one leads a more pleasant and joyful life in the Lord than he who, being always united with God, endeavors to fulfil his will exactly, although he now and then commits a fault through human frailty and with only half advertence. On the other hand, there can be no true peace, consolation, or rest for the man who, although he is resolved to escape hell, and abstains from grievous sin, as he imagines, and performs great works of virtue, yet knowingly acts contrary to the will of God even in one thing. For his own conscience constantly reproaches him in the midst of his good works, and says to him : you do not do all that God wills ; there is still something in you that is displeasing to God ; this or that God would be pleased to see you freed from, but you are still attached to it ; you do not love God with your whole heart. Therefore, if we wish to lead in this world a life that is joyful in the Lord, we must attend to that first and greatest commandment, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul, with all thy strength and with all thy mind ; that is, you must do without exception all that God wills you to do ; you must abstain without exception from all that is displeasing to him and contrary to his will, no matter how small it is, and you must regard it with an unconquerable hatred.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE REASON WE HAVE FOR BEING GRATEFUL TO GOD.

"*He fell on his face before his feet, giving thanks.*" *Luke* 17 : 16.

Ten lepers came to Jesus, begging of him to heal them : "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." "Go," said our merciful Lord to them, "show yourselves to the priests ;" that is, offer the sacrifice prescribed for lepers. And while they were yet on the way, they were healed of their loathsome disease. "One of them, when he saw that he was made clean, went back, with a loud voice glori-

fying God, and he fell on his face before his feet, giving thanks." This Samaritan did not go on as he was told, to show himself to the priests. He forgot both temple and sacrifice in his eagerness to return and thank his Benefactor. And what is still more remarkable, Christ publicly praised him who thus came back, nor did he urge on him the necessity of offering the sacrifice commanded, but said to him: "Arise, go thy way; for thy faith hath made thee whole." Why was that? Because he had already made a sufficient offering in giving glory to God; it was not necessary for him to offer any other sacrifice, because gratitude is the most pleasing of all the gifts that can be offered to God. It is of this gratitude to God that I am now going to speak to you, and I say,

God deserves and expects from us mortals a constant, unceasing gratitude.

There is nothing that binds the hearts and minds of men closer together than benefits; and therefore the philosopher Aristotle says with reason: "he who receives a benefit finds fetters;" for they chain his heart, as it were, and compel it by a sort of violence to be grateful to his benefactor. A natural instinct impels me to love him who does me good. Even the most savage animals are tamed by kindness, and allow themselves to be led about anywhere by those who are kind to them, while they show their gratitude by fawning on and caressing them. Experience teaches us daily of domestic animals, such as horses, oxen, cats, and especially dogs, with what wonderful fidelity and unwearied love they wait on man, their master, obey his behests in all things, no matter how difficult, and that, too, for the coarse and indifferent food they receive from him. How great the faithfulness, obedience, and submission of the dog to his master! Day and night he is ready at all times to defend him against robbers and murderers; and even when his master chastises him, he does not make any opposition, or show his teeth, but lies down at his feet and shows his willingness to obey in all things. Why? Because his master feeds him.

Lions, dragons, panthers, crocodiles, serpents are not a whit be-

hind domestic animals in this way. It was a lion that astonished the whole city of Rome, when on one occasion a malefactor was sentenced to be thrown before him to be devoured. When the fierce animal saw the man, he lay down at his feet, licking them like a dog, and defended him against the other wild animals that ran up to attack him. What was the reason of this proceeding? Three years before, that same man had seen that lion in the desert suffering great pain from a thorn in his paw; he drew out the thorn and healed the wound. In the city of Carthage two fierce lions, that were tamed by kindness, used to follow Hanno through the streets like dogs. A panther once laid aside its natural ferocity and brought in safety through a forest beset with robbers a man who had lifted up its young out of a deep hole into which they had fallen. A terrible dragon once defended a man from the attacks of murderers and saved his life, because it had been brought up with that man while both were still young. Many similar instances are on record of eagles, storks, and serpents. Even wild beasts are sensible of kindness, nor is there any animal so savage as not to be tamed by diligence and made to love its benefactor.

And yet, I wish to show reasoning beings, and they, too, Catholic Christians, that a benefactor deserves to be regarded with feelings of thankfulness. Truly, there cannot be the least doubt of that, nor is there any one who will not see at a glance that such is the case. Therefore I cannot sufficiently express my astonishment at the envious Scribes and Pharisees. "The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, do you see that we prevail nothing? behold, the whole world is gone after him" (John 12 : 19). They spoke thus because they saw with great amazement that crowds of people were following Christ everywhere, in town and country; see, they exclaimed, how the people are all running after him. O senseless Pharisees! what are you wondering at? Have you not heard or seen how Christ acted towards the people? He "went about doing good and healing all" (Acts 10 : 38). Wherever he goes he does good; he fed the people miraculously in the desert; he healed the sick, made the blind to see, the lame to walk; he cleansed lepers, and

freed those possessed by the devil; he comforted the sorrowful, raised the dead to life, and did good to all. And yet you are surprised that such a crowd of people should follow their Benefactor? Reason itself convinces us, and we all readily agree, that we owe gratitude and love to one from whom we have received benefits.

Who of us will refuse to acknowledge that we are surrounded, on all sides by the proofs of God's goodness? What we have been up to this, what we still are, and what we hope to be in eternity is all an effect of the perfect goodness of God. Whatever we have in or outside ourselves is nothing but a gift bestowed on us by God. Nothing but a gift, I say, and such a one as we cannot find amongst men on earth. We cannot find a purely unselfish generosity amongst men. It is God alone who does good at every moment through the most perfect generosity, seeking nothing else but to do us good. For what other motive could he have? He has nothing to expect from us; no evil to fear, no good to hope for. We must all say to him with the prophet: "Thou art my God, for thou hast no need of my goods" (Ps. 15: 2). Thou art not in need of my gifts, nor of my love, nor can I add to or take away from thy infinite happiness.

If, then, nature prompts us to be grateful to a man who is kind to us, although his motive is not an unselfish one; nay, if we feel bound to make some return even to irrational animals, to a dog, for instance, for services they render us when we compel them to do so: how constant should not our gratitude be to the most generous God, who does good to us out of pure liberality! And the Lord expects that from us and has expected it at all times in the history of the world. In the very beginning, after he had created all things in six days, "He blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it" (Gen. 2: 3). Why so? That we might remember his goodness to us. Adam and Eve, our first parents, had been created the day before in paradise, so that, when they saw the various creatures that he had made for their use, they might hold a feast of thanksgiving to their bounteous Creator; therefore the Lord made the seventh day a holy one.

In the Old Law, whenever God bestowed some special benefit on his people, he always added a strict command to keep the anniversary of the day holy, and to celebrate it by a thanksgiving feast. Thus, even at the present day, the Jews, although their religion is no longer the true one, still keep up the old tradition of returning special thanks to God for having preserved their forefathers in life on the night when he slew all the first-born of the Egyptians. In the same way they celebrate the memory of their passing through the Red Sea, of their having been so wonderfully saved from their enemies, of their having been fed with bread from heaven. For the same reason they were commanded to keep in the Ark a piece of the manna, to remind them constantly of the gratitude they owed to God. Nay, all the sacrifices of the Old Law were intended for no other purpose but to excite the people to gratitude. Such, too, is the meaning of the third commandment: Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Remember,—what is the meaning of that? The word is not made use of in the other commandments. God does not say, remember to honor thy father and thy mother; remember that thou shalt not kill, or steal, or commit adultery. But he does say, Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Why? That we may understand that the keeping holy of the Sabbath day is not pleasing to God on account of abstaining from servile works, but chiefly on account of the grateful remembrance we should then have of the benefits conferred on us by him during the week. Remember! This is the thought we should foster every Sunday and holy-day, instead of profaning those days with idly walking about, drinking, gambling and other amusements, as is unfortunately too often the case.

Now, if the Lord required such constant gratitude from his people in the Old Law, the law of fear and terror, what constant gratitude has he not reason to expect from his Christians, from his children under the New Law, the law of love, that holy and perfect law, which is filled with such extraordinary gifts and graces? Hear what the Apostle St. Paul says of this: "All whatsoever you do in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Coloss. 3 : 17). And, again, to the Ephesians : "Giving thanks always for all things, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father"(Ephes. 5 : 20). And to the Thessalonians : " In all things give thanks ; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you all."(1. Thess. 5 : 18). Mark how he says that we should always give thanks without ceasing ; for God never ceases for a moment showering down his benefits on us. If a man does good to me, the benefit ceases when it is conferred, as far as he is concerned ; it lasts no longer than the help rendered me, or the enjoyment of the gift presented to me. But God is constant in doing good to me, so that I can say with truth, not only that all I have and am comes from him, and was given me by him either in my creation or afterwards, but I must also acknowledge that the same good God continues to give me all I have and am every moment of my life ; for every moment, in preserving my being, he, as it were, creates it anew. Now, if I should never forget a benefit conferred on me by a man, although many years may have passed since then, and the enjoyment of the benefit is at an end, truly, then I am much more bound to remember the goodness of God, who never ceases showering down benefits on me, and to whose generosity I owe every minute of my life. That is what the Apostle means by the words, "Giving thanks always for all things, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father."

The whole day we spend in the enjoyment of the divine benefits. Do we think even once with attentive minds of our Benefactor, and return him due thanks ? Yes, truly, when there is danger of some calamity, or temporal loss, or misfortune, or of the death of a dear child or friend, then, indeed, we can seek our God fairly; then we are ready to promise mountains of gold to prove our gratitude if he will only save us from the evil we dread. Nor is this wrong. But when the danger and dread of the evil are past, and we have obtained what we sought for from heaven, how do we act then ? It is even a great thing if we acknowledge that the Lord

God is our special benefactor. But where is our promise. Are we eager to show our constant thankfulness by being more zealous in the divine service, by loving God better, by more carefully avoiding the dangers and occasions of sin, by shunning even deliberate venial sin? Ah, far from it. The remembrance of the divine generosity soon fades, and little or nothing of what we promised is fulfilled. We are importunate in asking, uneasy until we have received, and ungrateful afterwards.

A heathen, who was so dangerously ill that the physician despaired of his recovery, besought the god Jupiter to help him, promising that he would be ever grateful to him and sacrifice a hundred oxen as a thanksoffering. One of his domestics, who knew that the poor man was not able to make such an offering, reproved him for making a promise he could not fulfil. Fool, said the sick man to him, what difference does that make? A promise costs nothing, and if by means of it I can recover my health, it will be well bestowed. Do you think that Jupiter will perhaps come down from his throne on Olympus to demand the fulfilment of my promise? I do not think so myself; I rather imagine he will not trouble himself about the matter. Such conduct in a blind heathen may be excused. But it is a deplorable fact that many Christians do not act better to the true God. During public calamities, or privite misfortunes, oh, what beautiful promises are sent forth to heaven! what seemingly strong resolutions of amendment! what fervent determinations to love God in future! But the result shows that all these fine promises are like that of the heathen. You must know, however, that our God is not a god of wood or stone, who may be deceived by flattery and be cozened. To humble one's self before God, to speak to him fairly, to adore him and beseech him under pressure of calamity, or when there is something of importance to be obtained from him, that is neither love nor gratitude, but selfishness, and egotism.

True gratitude shows itself after the benefit has been received and consists in the constant recollection of and thanksgiving for the goodness of God, that never ceases. And ingratitude does

not consist so much in not repaying a benefit, for that might be impossible to those whose poverty makes them unable to give anything ; nor in the fact that one does not return unceasing thanks to his benefactor, for the absence of the latter might often render that also impossible; but the worst form of ingratitude is to forget the benefits received.

Let us not forget the benefits conferred on us by God, but always keep the recollection of them alive, that we may be thus urged to continual gratitude for them. Let us not allow wild animals even to surpass us in gratitude.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE ADVANTAGES OF GRATITUDE TO GOD.

"*Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God ana his justice ; and all these things shall be added unto you.*" Matt. 6 : 33.

If we were not wanting in piety and child-like confidence in God, how well would it be for us, not only in spiritual, but also in temporal things ! But at the same time I cannot help thinking what a debt of gratitude we owe that good God who means so well with us ! Last Sunday I showed how the Lord God deserves and expects a constant gratitude from us mortals, and that too, with the best reason ; for everything we have in and outside ourselves is a pure gift of the divine Generosity, from which he has no profit whatever, except his honor and glory, and in which he has no other motive but to do us good. Now the Lord, in seeking this gratitude from us, does not look for any advantage for himself, but rather for us ; so that I might change the words of my text, and say with confidence to you : Be only grateful to God for the benefits received from him, and all the other benefits that you can wish or desire will be added unto you.

God expects us to be grateful for the benefits he confers on us, his

sole object therein being that he may be able to do us still more good; therefore we should offer him our constant gratitude for even the least benefit, and give him thanks unceasingly.

All of us on this earth are poor, needy beggars, who have to knock at the door of the almighty Father to ask for alms. All that we have and are comes from the hand of God: God alone is the Giver and Dispenser and Preserver of all the goods we have or hope for. With reason, then, does the Apostle St. James say: "Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration" (James 1 : 17). Therefore he who is in want must have recourse to the almighty God. And, oh, how easy it is always to have audience with this Lord, any day or any hour! He awaits our petitions with the greatest desire to share with men the treasure of his giftsand graces, which cannot be exhausted, no matter what calls are made on it. The only return he expects for his gifts is gratitude; and the only reason why he expects that is that he may be, as it were, compelled and forced to bestow still greater and more numerous benefits on us. If I thank a man who has done me good, I am still under an obligation to him and am still his debtor, for he has a right to demand a favor from me. If I thank God for the good he does me, he places himself under an obligation to me for my gratitude, and becomes, as it were, my debtor, for he binds himself to repay me for my first act of gratitude with a fresh favor.

Such is the teaching of the example of Jesus Christ; for it is most worthy of note that almost invariably before performing a miracle, especially one that was particularly beneficial to men, he first gave thanks to his Eternal Father. When he was about to feed the hungry multitude in the desert, and had not more than five barley loaves at hand, what did he do? "And Jesus took the loaves: and when he had given thanks, he distributed to them that were sat down" (John 6 : 11). After he had given thanks, the few loaves were multiplied to such an extent that five thousand

people had enough to eat, and there was left as much as filled twelve baskets. When about to raise Lazarus from the dead, who had already been four days in the grave, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, I give thee thanks that thou hast heard me. When he had said these things, he cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth" (John 11: 41, 43). And the dead man came to life at once. That most wonderful of all miracles, and at the same time the greatest benefit he has conferred on us, namely, the Blessed Sacrament, in which he has given us himself, God and Man, as the food and drink of our souls till the end of the world, he did not wish to institute until he had first given thanks. For as the priest says on the altar, in the words of the Evangelist, "Who the day before he suffered took bread into his sacred and venerable hands, and having raised his eyes to heaven, to thee, God, his Almighty Father, giving thanks to thee, blessed," etc. The same happened when he changed wine into his precious blood; for the priest continues: "In like manner, after he had supped, taking also this excellent chalice into his holy and venerable hands, giving thee also thanks, he blessed," etc. All this is to teach us that our petitions for future gifts should arise out of our gratitude for preceding ones, and also that gratitude is the best means of increasing and multiplying, even miraculously, as was the case with the loaves and fishes in the Gospel, the gifts and graces of God we already possess.

Just souls have always had happy experience of this. When the divine anger was about to destroy the whole sinful world and all its inhabitants, Noe and his family were saved. And why was Noe the only one who found grace? Why were he and his family saved, when all the other inhabitants of the earth were drowned in the deluge? He had not implored that favor of God, for he knew nothing of the impending calamity until God revealed it to him, and yet God had resolved to save him even before he asked. What was the reason of that? What great merit had Noe in the sight of God more than others? Hear what St. John Chrysostom says in explanation of this, representing God speaking to Noe:

"Thou art the only one whom I have found grateful; and therefore, when all the others are perishing, I command thee and thy family to enter the ark." For the people of those days were like brute beasts in their forgetfulness of God, and they ascribed the temporal goods they enjoyed to nature and their own industry, so that they did not thank their Creator for them. Noe, on the other hand, acknowledged with grateful heart that he owed all to God; and hence he and his family were saved from the general destruction in reward of his gratitude, although he had not asked that favor from God. Again, afer the deluge, God was fully appeased, and made not only to Noe and his family, but also to all their descendants, that magnificent promise, "I will no more curse the earth for the sake of men;" never shall it be again inundated by a deluge; "I will no more destroy every living soul as I have done" (Gen. 8 : 21). What moved God to make this promise? Nothing but the gratitude of Noe, for hardly had he set foot on dry land, when, "he built an altar unto the Lord, and taking all cattle and fowls that were clean, offered holocausts upon the altar" (Gen. 8 : 20), as a thanksgiving for being saved from the flood. He so pleased the Lord thereby that he received that promise for himself and his descendants of never again being afflicted by such a calamity.

David, considering the benefits he had received from God, cries out in astonishment: "What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he hath rendered to me?" (Ps. cxv. 12.) He does not say, What shall I render to the Lord for all the things he hath given to me or bestowed on me? but, "all the things he hath rendered me." Why? What does he mean by that? "To render" means to give a person something I am bound to give him in gratitude. Was God, then, bound to give David anything out of gratitude? It seems as if David was the first to give, and God then gave him something in return. What did David give? Gratitude. He thanked his God for the benefit of creation and preservation: and this gratitude was looked on by God as a benefit for which he should make some return. It was as if they were vieing

with each other as to who should make the best return. God gave to David ; David thanked him ; God rewarded this gratitude with fresh favors ; David again thanked God ; this gave a fresh impulse to the divine liberality ; and so, since the gratitude of David was unceasing, God could not stop conferring favors on him. This it was that excited David's astonishment. O my God, he exclaimed, how is this to end ? "What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he hath rendered to me?" When Anna, who had long been unfruitful, at last bore a son, Samuel, she hastened to offer him in the temple for the service of the Lord in token of gratitude, and she intoned this joyful canticle : "My heart hath rejoiced in the Lord. There is none holy as the Lord is ; for there is no other beside thee, and there is none strong like our God" (1. Kings 2 : 1, 2). Anna was now quite satisfied ; she had obtained her request, for she had given birth to a son ; and she desired nothing more. But God was not satisfied with that, because Anna showed herself grateful to him, and therefore he, too, had, so to speak, to show himself grateful to her. "And the Lord visited Anna," says the Scripture, "and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters ; and the child Samuel became great before the Lord" (1. Kings 2 : 21). See what Anna gained by this transaction, "that is, by her first act of thanksgiving." God gave her five children, which she never asked him for, because she showed herself grateful for the first child he gave her.

Ah, Christians, which of us must not acknowledge that he is in need of the divine goodness every moment of his life ? And who does not wish to receive still more numerous and greater benefits from God ? Nothing is more agreeable than to receive a good thing that we are eager to possess. But gratitude is the key to the inexhaustible treasury of that Lord of infinite wealth. Go with confidence and ask of him what you wish ; all you have to do is to return thanks for what he has already given you, and the new gifts and graces are already prepared for you. "Be nothing solicitous," says St. Paul "but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God "

(Phil. 4: 6); for gratitude gives prayer its greatest efficacy. Do you wish, therefore, to be in good health? Then thank God for the health he has given you hitherto. Do you wish to have means to support yourself and your family? Then thank God for the daily bread he gives you. Do you wish to bring up your children well, so that God may bless them? Then thank him that he has preserved them in innocence up to this. Have you some affair on hand that you wish to bring to a successful termination? Thank God for having so often helped you in your business and aided you with his fatherly protection. Are you visited by suffering, crosses, or trials? Thank God for having saved you from still worse, which many others have to complain of. Have you suffered loss in your temporal affairs through misfortune? Thank God for having preserved to you so long what his Providence knew to be for your good, and for having now taken it away for the same reason. Are you well endowed in temporal matters? Thank God for it, and through Christian charity share your wealth with those who have nothing, that so God may preserve it to you. If you have little, then thank God for that, too, and through gratitude give to him, in the persons of the poor, some of the little you possess.

Again, if you have done anything for your soul to the honor and glory of God, return him most humble thanks for the grace he has given you, without which you could not do the least good action. But you must know that to say to one's self, "I do no good" (as is the custom with many, who undervalue and despise all their prayers, Masses, holy Communions, and other works of piety and devotion, although they try to do them well; and who look on them as if they were of no value whatever), is not humility, as those people imagine it to be, but ingratitude towards God, for thus the grace of God is not appreciated and prized as it should be. No; no matter how small the good work is, you must look on it as a benefit from God, and thank him for it, that you may thus it more grace, and be able to do still more good. You have some good in you, but you have nothing of yourself; this

thought will make you neither proud nor ungrateful. Learn to be thankful even for the smallest benefit, and let not one gift go without expressing your gratitude for it, so that you may thus become worthy of greater favors.

Christians, if you wish to obtain great favors from God, thank him for small ones. Worldly goods are the least of the benefits that God bestows on us, although he does give them to the grateful. It is to heavenly, supernatural, and eternal goods that our wishes and desires should tend; and these we shall obtain in abundance from God, if we are only grateful to him always. The grace of persevering in the friendship of God, the grace of a happy death, oh, what a magnificent grace! Can we desire any greater gift than that on which our happiness for eternity depends, and which is of the utmost importance for us? for no man with all his good works can merit it in the present arrangement of God's providence. And who will obtain that grace? Do you wish to know? He who during life was grateful to God. We can purchase this inestimable gift of perseverance from God so cheaply by gratitude! Let us resolve, then, to be more grateful than we have hitherto been, and never will we cease in all our actions, which shall be directed to God's honor and glory, to thank him for all he has done for us. Our first thought in the morning when we awake, our last thought at night when we retire to rest, all our thoughts, words, and actions during the day, whenever we think of God, shall be nothing but a constant *Deo Gratias!* Thanks be to God! Eternal thanks be to God for all the good he has done us. Praise and honor be to the God of goodness now and forever. Amen.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MANY REASONS WE HAVE FOR BEING GRATEFUL TO GOD.

"*They glorified God, saying, ... God hath visited his people.*"
Luke 7 : 16.

Not alone those who were present on this occasion, but all in the country who heard of it, were filled with feelings of awe and respect: "This rumor of him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the country round about." Ah, Christians, what reason have we nowadays to praise and glorify our God, for every day he raises the dead to life, not indeed to a mortal life, but to a much better one, when he restores sinners to his favor, and gives back to them, when they repent, the life of grace. But what countless other benefits do we not daily and hourly receive from the divine Goodness! And that, too, from a God of the most pure and perfect goodness, who requires a constant gratitude from us; a gratitude which God looks for only that he may bestow still more on us as a reward for it. Now I say further, that, even if we had no profit or advantage from it, still common decency should impel us to be grateful to God on account of the many general and special benefits we have received from him.

I. The number of the general benefits we have received from God oblige us to a constant and unceasing gratitude.

II. The number of the special benefits we have received from God oblige us to a constant and unceasing gratitude.

I. The kings of Persia kept diaries in which they wrote down from day to day all the services and good actions performed for them by their vassals and subjects. For instance, in that year and month, and on that day, such an official gave me good advice, which was of great advantage for the kingdom. On that day such a minister reminded me of an important matter that I should otherwise have forgotten. On that day such a soldier risked his life

to render me this or that service. They were in the habit of frequently reading those diaries, so as to keep alive the memory of the services rendered them, and not allow them to go unrewarded. Thus we read in the book of Esther, that king Assuerus, having been saved by Mardochai from a conspiracy that threatened his life, wrote an account of this act in his diary. After the lapse of some considerable time he happened to read this, and at once asked his ministers : "What honor and reward hath Mardochai received for this fidelity ? His servants and ministers said to him : He hath received no reward at all" (Esth. 6 : 3). What, exclaimed Assuerus ; no reward for such a service as that ? That is not right ; it is a gross forgetfulness on my part. Call Aman to me at once. And when Aman entered, the king caused Mardochai to be clad in the royal garments, to be mounted on his own horse, and be thus led through the city, so that all might learn how he wished to honor his faithful servant.

O Christians ! If you and I were to keep an account of all the benefits that we receive from the good God, should we not have to say, as St. John did of the actions of Christ, "There are also many other things which Jesus did : which if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written" (John 21 : 25). The same we should say of the benefits received from God ; for, if they were to be all written down in detail, the world would not be able to hold the books that should be written. Think and reflect as much as you like, you will not be able to comprehend all you owe to the goodness of God. Turn whither you will, and you find yourself surrounded on all sides by his benefits ; nay from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot you are made of nothing else than gifts of God.

1. Thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, or eighty years ago, what were you ? Nothing. It was God who gave you the being that you now have, and that, too, out of pure goodness, for he was not in the least want of you ; and he gave that being to you in preference

to many other creatures that he might have created and still can create, who would have served him far better and more zealously than you do, and yet he has left them in the abyss of their nothingness. And what sort of a being did he give you? The most excellent of all, that of the Angels alone excepted. How have you, *O man*, deserved to have life, whereas at first you were a mere nothing, just as the stone was? Ask the trees and plants; they will tell you that they received from God being and vegetative life, as you did; but they are wanting in feeling. And what have you done to merit that excellent property? Ask your dog and your horse; they will tell you that they have received being, life, and feeling from God, as well as you, but that they have not reason nor an immortal soul as you have. What merit had you in the sight of God, that he should bestow on you reason like the Angels? What have you done to deserve that your soul should be stamped with the image of his Godhead, that he should create you to possess himself, and to be happy with him, if you wish, in his eternal kingdom of heaven?

To have been nothing before, and now to be the image of God, the child of God, and heir of heaven; what an immense benefit that is! Greater, indeed, and more glorious than if one were to raise a poor peasant girl from a stable to a royal throne. Alexander the Great considered himself under an obligation to his horse, because it had once saved his life. What valuable presents are sometimes given to a doctor who succeeds in curing a rich man of some dangerous malady! If after death you were raised from the dead by some worker of miracles, what feelings of gratitude would not animate you in his regard! But it is not nearly so great a benefit to be raised from the dead as to be created out of nothing; to be recalled to life from the tomb as to be called forth out of the abyss of nothingness to life. Ask yourself now, in the words of king Assuerus, "What honor and reward hath he received for this fidelity?" What return have you hitherto made to God for such a priceless benefit? Perhaps you will have to confess to your great shame and confusion: "He hath received no

reward at all." God has had nothing in return from me; hardly have I even thought seriously of what I owe him.

2. Open now the chronicle of your life, and what do you find on the first page? By inheriting the sin of Adam you were an unhappy slave of the devil, an object of the divine anger, a child of reprobation. What did it not cost your God to free you from this misery and to save you from eternal death? It cost him his Incarnation; the price he paid for you is the labor of his thirty-three years on earth, the hunger and thirst, the heat and cold, the poverty and want he suffered for your sake; you cost him his honor and his blood, which he shed for you to the last drop; and finally you cost him his life, which he gave up on the shameful cross to save you from death. This is the benefit in which the divine omnipotence and love have done their utmost, so that, if you were God, and he were your servant, he could not do more to prove his love for you. Ask yourself again, "What honor and reward hath he received for this fidelity?" Ah! "he hath received no reward at all."

3. Consider further, if some good friend were to give you a costly present, a ring, for instance, worth some thousand pounds, and you lost it soon after through carelessness, would you not still look on yourself as under a great obligation to your generous benefactor? Now, God has given you being, and the noble and precious being of a rational creature, made to his own image, redeemed by his blood; and not only has he given it to you, but he constantly preserves it for you lest you should lose it. In addition to this, reflect how good and kind God is to you, how he takes, as it were, all the trouble and labor on himself, that you may enjoy repose; look on what is around you in the world, and when you have considered everything outside yourself, you will have to acknowledge that God is indeed kind to you. See the sun during the day, the moon at night; count, if you can, the stars in the firmament, the birds in the air, the fishes in the waters, the animals on the land, the trees in the forest, the crops in the fields,

the herbs and flowers in the gardens, the grapes in the vineyards, the fire that warms you, the waters that cool you, the bread that daily forms your food, the clothes that cover you, the men with whom you converse, the Angels that are always at your side to protect you ; consider all these things well. Do you know what they are ? They are nothing else but benefits bestowed on you by God ; he has given them to you ; all these creatures cry out : O man, we are made for you, and the Sovereign God has commanded us to serve you, either for your necessary support, or for your decent recreation and amusement, or to give you a better knowledge and more zealous love of God, so that, helped by us, you may the more easily attain your last end—eternal happiness in heaven. O man, it is for your sake that we exist, and yet you do not love him who has made us for you ! O man, I add, is there any servant or attendant who so faithfully looks after his master's interest as God does after yours and mine ?

It is true that I possess those things in common with other men ; but am I therefore less bound to return thanks to God ? Do I not enjoy those things as well as if they had been made for me alone ? What difference does it make that he has given to others the same things he has bestowed on you ? Have you received less on that account, or derived less profit ? If a prince were to give you and all your fellow-citizens a certain sum of money every year, would your present be less because others receive the same, or would you owe less gratitude to your prince ? If a father clothes his six sons with the same costly stuffs, must they not all be equally grateful to him ? Do you lose any light because the sun shines on all men ? Does it harm you that the earth bears all men as long as it continues to bear you ? The rain moistens all countries, the fire warms all who approach it, the air refreshes all who breathe it ; are you any worse off on that account, or have you not as much of these things as if you alone enjoyed them ? All these benefits you enjoy daily in common with all men. Do you not see what a debt of honor and gratitude you owe your Benefactor ? But perhaps you still consider these

things as small, precisely because they are common ; then open your own particular diary, and examine the special benefits that God has bestowed on you in preference to other men, from the first moment of your life to the present day.

II. Answer me these questions : How is it that your neighbor is poor, and has hardly bread enough for himself and his family, while you are well provided with everything ? Why must so many work hard all day to earn their bread, while your food is placed on the table without any labor on your part ? Why are you so well clad, while so many are covered with rags ? Why is that man blind, while you have good sight ? That other deaf and dumb, while you can hear and speak ? That other a cripple, while you have the perfect use of your limbs ? Why is one man ugly and deformed, and you are not so ? Why is that man stupid, simple-minded, ignorant, while you are clever ? Why are you in good health, and so many others sickly and delicate ? Why have others to live in the midst of trials and crosses, while you are prospering, or at all events have much less to suffer than they? Tell me the reason of all this, the cause of such a great difference. Those others are men as well as you ; can you prove that you are more deserving than they ? Could not God have caused you to be born in the same circumstances, the same poverty and misery ? Could he not at this very moment place you in the same position they are in ? And if you are better off now, to whom do you owe that ? To no other but your good and gracious God. "What honor and reward hath he received for this fidelity ?" What return of honor, gratitude, and love have you made him ? "He hath received no reward at all." Perhaps you have not thought even once of thanking him.

1. If you wish to consider a still greater special benefit conferred upon you by God, then go in thought through so many towns and countries of Europe, Africa, Asia, America, China, Japan, India, Brazil, Persia, Morocco, Greece, Sweden, Denmark, England, Holland, and many other places inhabited by heathens,

infidels, Turks, Jews and heretics; find out, if you can, how many came into the world in those countries on the very day on which you saw the light. Tell me now, why—since Catholic Christendom, compared to all the other forms of religion in the world, is so small in numbers—why have you had the happiness of being born of Catholic parents and brought up by them? You, in preference to so many others, and even to Catholics who have to live among infidels or heretics, and thus have not the opportunities that you enjoy—you are often strengthened by the holy Sacraments, fed with the precious flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, and encouraged to good by the word of God. How many children, even amongst Catholics, die before birth, or immediately after, without Baptism, so that they can never hope to attain the beatific vision of God? Why was that not the case with you? Who spoke a good word for you to save you from it? Must you not gratefully acknowledge, praise, and glorify the special goodness of God in your regard?

2. Still another question I have to ask you: How long is it since you committed the first mortal sin? Suppose that it is ten, twenty, or thirty years ago; tell me now, why are you not ten, twenty, or thirty years in hell? What great merit have you had before God more than so many others who were surprised by a premature death in the midst of their sins, and hurried down to hell? Why has not God had such patience with that man, that woman, that boy, that girl, your own companion in sin perhaps, and waited for their repentance? They are now in the flames of hell, and will be there forever; but you, who have perhaps committed far more sins, have been allowed time for penance by the mercy of God, so that, if you wish, you can gain heaven. Think what an immense benefit that is, that the Lord has freed you from hell and the punishment you so richly deserved every time you committed mortal sin, as soon as you repented of and confessed your guilt.

3. But perhaps you have never offended God by mortal sin? If

so, I wish you joy. You have a still greater benefit to be thankful for, since God has saved you in preference to many others from the dangers and occasions of sin in such a special manner, either by keeping away temptations from you, or by giving you his powerful graces in them, without which graces you would have lamentably fallen. "What honor and reward hath he received for this fidelity?" What thanks and praise has God received from you in return for such a priceless benefit? "He hath received no reward at all".

If we have any sense of honor left, what feelings of gratitude should not even this slight enumeration of the divine benefits excite in us? Must we not often say with our whole hearts, in the words of David: "What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he hath rendered to me?" Ah, my God, what return can I make for thy goodness to me? If all the members of my body were so many tongues, and I did nothing all my life but praise and thank thee, would that be too much for me to do? Nay, would it be enough?

A certain man had his eyes put out, and his hands and feet cut off, and thus blind, lame, and mutilated, he led a most wretched life. One of his friends once said to him, If some one who could work miracles were to come to you and restore you your limbs, so that you could walk about again, what reward would you give him? I would cheerfully give him a hundred thousand ducats, if I had so much in my possession, answered the cripple. But if he gave you back your hands as well, continued the other, what would you give him then? Everything I could scrape together in the world, was the answer. And if he, moreover, restored you your sight, what then? If the whole world was mine with all its riches, answered the other, I would willingly bestow it on him, and be his servant also all the days of my life, ready to fulfil his every wish. Hear, O man, whoever you be: Who has given you life? God. Who has given you eyes, and hands, and feet, and all you have? God. But these are small benefits compared to the others. What do you, then, intend doing to prove your gratitude to him?

Is it right and just for you to allow even one moment of your life to pass without spending it in his service by a good intention? Is it not right and just that at all events once or twice in the day, in the morning early and in the evening when you are making the examen of conscience, before retiring to rest, you should recollect what you owe to God, and thank him for it? The swine that are sent into the forest to fatten eat the whole day, and sink down on the ground in the evening satiated, without once looking up to the kindly tree that provided them with food. Such conduct suits swine well enough, but not rational creatures, for no reasoning being should be so ungrateful as to fatten, as it were, the whole day on the divine Goodness and then throw himself down on his bed without thanking the Giver. Christians, do not forget your morning prayers, nor the evening examen of the faults you have committed during the day, and if you can find no faults to accuse yourselves of, the benefits bestowed on you by God will furnish you with sufficient matter for reflection.

Countless are the benefits we owe to God. Is it, then, possible that we can wilfully offend such a generous Lord? Is it possible that we do not love him with our whole hearts? When the holy bishop and martyr Polycarp was brought before the tribunal, and the heathen judge threatened him with the most atrocious torments if he did not renounce the faith of Christ, "How can I renounce my Lord, who is so good?" was the holy man's answer. I am now serving him for sixty-eight years, and during all that time he has never done me the least harm, but has constantly overwhelmed me with benefits; how, then, can I abandon him and forsake his service? No, there is no torment that can force me to be unfaithful, or to forget the gratitude I owe my generous Benefactor. Use against me the worst torments tyranny can invent, hew me into a thousand pieces, roast me alive, boil me in oil, I am ready to bear it all with joy for the love of that God who has shown me such love and generosity during my life. The only thing I regret is that I have not a thousand lives to sacrifice for him in return for his priceless love and generosity. How

could I be untrue to such a good Lord? My dear Christians, let us think the same when assailed by temptations and allurements to sin, whether they come from the devil, from men, or from our own evil inclinations; let us at once recall the countless benefits we owe the Divine Goodness, and say with St. Polycarp, How can I renounce my Lord, who is so good? During my whole life he has never done the slightest thing to injure me. If now and then he has sent me a cross, it was with a good intention on his part and for my greater advantage, so that I ought to thank him for that also. Otherwise I have been feeding on his benefits every moment of my life, and now shall I turn my back on him, and set him at naught by trampling his law under foot? No, I cannot do that. Away with all the goods of the world and all the joys and pleasures of the flesh! Away with the flatteries and praises of men! I would rather die a thousand times than wilfully offend by sin God, my Sovereign Benefactor. Amen.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE NATURE OF GRATITUDE TO GOD.

"*But he, taking him, healed him.*" *Luke* 14 : 4.

We have hitherto treated of the gratitude we owe to God for the benefits he has bestowed on us, and we have seen,

1. That he expects a constant, unceasing gratitude from us mortals, since he confers benefits on us out of pure goodness without hoping to gain anything himself thereby, and he never ceases doing good to us for a moment.

2. That he expects this gratitude solely in order that he may thus be induced to bestow still greater benefits on us; from which we came to the conclusion that he who has but a little is already rich enough, and can obtain from God all that is necessary for his salvation, provided he is only grateful for what he has already re-

ceived ; therefore we should at once return heartfelt thanks to God even for the least benefit.

3. We have represented to ourselves the number of the general and special benefits that God showers down on us daily, and on which we hardly bestow a thought ; from which we concluded that every man with any sense of honor should be unceasingly grateful to God.

4. We have experienced feelings of horror for that vice ; for, as a general rule, they who are most endowed by God with worldly goods are most wanting in gratitude to him. But now, if you wish to know what you are to do so as to prove your gratitude to God in a fitting manner, I shall answer your question in this sermon.

I. True gratitude to God consists chiefly in loving him with our whole hearts above all things.

II. How are we to know whether and in what degree we have hitherto been grateful to God?

I. True gratitude to God consists in three things. The first is, to acknowledge the benefit received. The second is, to praise his benefactor and return him thanks. The third is, to make what return one can according to circumstances and opportunity. Therefore true gratitude must show itself in the memory ; for certainly a benefit is never worse bestowed than on one who hardly ever thinks of it, nor acknowledges in his heart that he has received it. It must show itself in speech and outward signs, by which the inward feelings of the heart are declared in praising and speaking highly of one's benefactor. David had, as it were, not tongues enough to give expression to his feelings whenever he recalled the benefits conferred on him by God ; and therefore he begged of all creatures in heaven and on earth to help him in sounding the praises of God. The three youths in the fiery furnace at Babylon, through gratitude at being preserved by God unhurt in the midst of the flames, invited all creatures to join with

them in praising their Creator. Finally, true gratitude must show itself in our thoughts, in our hearts, so that we endeavor to make what return we can for the benefit received.

The love of God above all things comprises these three conditions. Nay, if that love is wanting, none of the other requisites of true gratitude can be present. For I can look on what I have received as a real benefit without on that account loving my benefactor, and that is what all ungrateful men really do. I can also give utterance to expressions of the deepest gratitude, and praise him who has done good to me, without loving him or wishing well to him ; such is the conduct of hypocrites and time-servers, who are skilled in paying empty compliments. I can even make some actual return for the benefit received, and give my benefactor twice what he has given to me, without loving him ; and this is according to one of the maxims of the false, treacherous world, which acts in that way through policy, human respect, self-love, and the desire of gaining the esteem of men. But the all-seeing God does not accept that as true gratitude. No, it is the heart, it is true love that he wishes for first of all.

The two first-born sons of our forefather Adam, Cain and Abel, offered sacrifice of thanksgiving to God ; but how differently their sacrifices were accepted ! "The Lord had respect to Abel and to his offerings. But to Cain and his offerings he had no respect" (Gen. 3 : 5). Why ? I know well that some look for the cause of this difference in the gifts offered ; because Abel, as a shepherd, offered the first and best of his flock ; but Cain, the husbandman, offered only the last and most worthless of the fruits of the earth. But, why was Cain's gift worthless in the sight of God ? Because, while he was offering his goods, he did not offer himself, since his heart was filled with earthly desires. Abel first offered his heart, and then his goods, so that his sacrifice was valuable. Therefore God looked favorably on the sacrifice of Abel, but rejected that of Cain, because it was not offered with true love.

Seneca tells us that Æschines, a pupil of the philosopher Socrates,

when he saw his fellow-pupils giving presents to their master, and knew that his poverty made him unable to imitate their generosity, went to Socrates and said to him : My dear master, I am too poor to show my gratitude to you as I ought ; I have nothing but myself ; but what I have I give you with all my heart, and present myself to you. Truly, answered Socrates, you have given me much more than all the others ! See there, my dear brethren, the best and most acceptable thanks-offering we can make to our God and Lord. No matter how much I give him, he looks on it all as of no value if I keep back myself. God wishes to have my heart, and my whole heart, namely, the whole love of my heart ; that alone is enough to satisfy him. But by this I do not mean the act of charity that we make now and then during prayer ; for that is only a fitful, intermittent love, that has no constancy. I mean a constant, lasting love, a will once for all firmly determined to serve God with all possible zeal, to keep his commandments inviolably, to avoid even the least deliberate sin, to be fully resigned to his will in all things, and to do everything when, how, and because God wills it to be done.

If, then, true gratitude to God is to be measured according to our love for God, where shall we find you in the world ? How many even amongst us Christians resemble those of whom our Lord complains : "Hypocrites, well hath Isaias prophesied of you, saying : This people honoreth me with their lips ; but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15: 7, 8). We are generous enough to God as far as words go. When we are engaged at prayer in the church, or at public devotions, one act of thanksgiving follows the other, one act of charity the other, while we repeat those acts of love and gratitude a hundred times before our ordinary confessions and Communions. "This people honoreth me with their lips ;" all this is mere outward show, mere empty words ; but where is the heart meanwhile ? for that is what God wishes to have from us. Is it completely resigned to his holy will and determined to put away all that is displeasing to him ? Are you ready to give up even that sensual attachment to that person, of whom you think a hun-

dred times a day with impure love before you raise your mind to God, who is present, looking at you? Are you ready to put aside that secret wrath against that man who has injured you, and whom you therefore cannot bear to look on favorably? Are you willing to put aside that inordinate desire of temporal goods, which sometimes keeps you from serving God as you are bound to do? that human respect, through which you often neglect your duty, or say and do what is contrary to the law of Jesus Christ, for the sake of pleasing men? that inordinate love of your children, which makes you bring them up without due care, not chastising them when they deserve it, but encouraging them to lead idle, worldly lives, although negligence in this particular would be enough to make your Judge pronounce sentence of condemnation on you, even if you had no other sin on your soul? Have you put away out of your heart all these and many similar faults? No, you cannot make up your mind to do that; the great God, in spite of all his goodness to you, is not able to get that much out of you.

Again, how many of us perhaps side with those tepid Christians, who, although they find God so generous to them, are so niggardly to him that they wish to love him only so far as they are bound to do in order to avoid mortal sin and eternal damnation? Tell those Christians that they must give the first part of the day, as the most agreeable, to God by prayer; that every evening, before retiring to rest, they should assemble their families and, as all good Christians do, have night prayers and the examen of conscience, thanking God for the blessings given during the day, and begging his pardon for the faults committed; that on Sundays and holy-days they should be regular in going to the church to hear sermons, so as to be encouraged to serve God and be instructed in the duties of their state; that they should frequently go to confession, so as to keep their consciences always pure; that they should often approach the table of the Lord with becoming devotion and reverence and humility, so as to obtain copious graces from God. What! they say or think at once, to excuse themselves, I am not bound to do those things under pain of sin; I can do or

omit them as I please ; it is enough for me not to break the commandments in serious matters. Ah, blind mortals that you are ! how little you value your souls and your salvation, since you refuse to do what would make it easier to keep the commandments, and without which it is, humanly speaking, impossible to keep from breaking them ! Do not these excuses of yours show clearly enough your odious ingratitude to God, since you refuse to give him anything to which you are not strictly bound, and which is not absolutely necessary to save you from the fire of hell ? Shame on you !

If the just God had done nothing for you hitherto but what he is strictly bound to do, O ye miscreants ! in what a wretched plight you would now be ! God is not bound to give us anything, and yet, out of pure generosity, he has given us everything that we have and are ; while we are so niggardly in measuring out our service to him that we give him only what we are bound to under pain of sin, only what the fear of hell forces from us. Is that gratitude ? Is it not rather odious meanness towards the good God ?

And, finally, what are we to think of those who, instead of constantly loving God, do not hesitate to offend him, in spite of his goodness to them, by grievous sin ? Instead of the continual grateful remembrance of his benefits, their imaginations are always deliberately filled with sinful thoughts and images, so that God can find no place therein. Instead of praising and blessing God, their tongues are occupied with impure discourses and conversations, with which they mislead innocent souls and bring them into sin ; or with uncharitable talk, by which they injure their neighbor's good name and reputation ; or with cursing and swearing, with which they rail against the good God when and wherever anything happens to cross their humor. Thus, instead of giving their hearts altogether to God, they drive him away from them most cruelly, and close the door against him, so that he cannot enter. This is a terrible thing to think of, but still more terrible is it to remember that there are many of the kind amongst Christians.

There is a well-known old fable about the hedgehog. In the beginning of the spring, tormented by the cold and frosty winds, it came before the burrow of the rabbit, and begged of the latter to give it room until the cold weather should pass away, or else it should die. The rabbit consented, and allowed the hedgehog to enter. But as soon as the latter found its way in it began to unroll itself and displayed its prickly spines, so that the poor rabbit, not finding room to escape them on account of the smallness of the hole, was grievously wounded. It began to cry and complain; is this the thanks you give me, it said, for sheltering you? Keep off a little, at least; you see that I have not room to escape being hurt by your prickles. What! said the hedgehog; if you have no room here, go elsewhere. And the poor rabbit had to leave his home and seek shelter in some other place. This is a fable, but it is a true picture of the ingratitude of men towards their Sovereign Benefactor. They speak to him fair and make a thousand acts of gratitude and love with the lips; they cry out and appeal to him when they are in want. Oh, how well they can then humble themselves, and submit to him! But when it comes to actual proof, when they have got possession of the house, how unbecomingly they act towards their Host! That is, when they have received many benefits from God, and things go according to their wishes, oh, then they cry out: Away with God, we do not want him here! When they are sick and bedridden, or oppressed with sorrow, or suffering persecution, they are most diligent in prayer and visiting the church; they shed copious tears, and often receive the holy Communion with great devotion. But when they are restored to health, or freed from the trouble that oppressed them, what do they do? They spend their time in dancing and amusing themselves, in following the luxurious customs of the world, and offending God. They know very well that God and mortal sin cannot dwell in their hearts at the same time; but, for the sake of gratifying their wicked desires and passions, they do not hesitate to commit many sins. God complains and, as it were, says to them: You hurt me; I have not room in your heart! Is that

your thanks for my goodness to you? Away with you, then! is the terrible answer they give, at least in act, to their good God; away with you! I care not for your company.

Ungrateful man! do you turn God out of your heart because he has overwhelmed you with good things? Cannot he who has given you all you have take it away from you again? Cannot he who has given you health again send you a grievous illness? Cannot he who has blessed you and your household hurl you down into the depths of poverty and want at any moment? And yet you treat him with contempt at the very moment when things go according to your desires? Oh, blackest ingratitude which any man or even irrational animal can be guilty of! But what do I say? There is even a worse degree of ingratitude to be found amongst men. What is it? Hear what God himself says by the prophet Isaias: "Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied me with thy iniquities" (Is. 43: 24). You have forced me to serve you against myself on account of your sins, by those very benefits you received and do daily receive from me. By the clear understanding I gave you you have compelled me to help in your double-meaning expressions, which conceal the worst kind of poison for souls, and which you give utterance to amid laughter and merriment, to the great scandal of those who hear them; nay, you do actually commit those abominations to writing and scatter them abroad in all places. By the wealth I bestowed on you you have made me help you to gratify your pride, dissoluteness, revenge, and intemperance. Thus you have, as it were, compelled and forced me to be thy helper and coöperator in offending against my own law.

That is a fine way to show gratitude! And yet these very people pray in church with others, and praise God, and thank him with the lips, and offer him the holy Mass as a sacrifice of thanksgiving! Away with such prayers! Away with such works of devotion and thanksgiving and acts of love! "To what purpose do you bring me frankincense from Saba? Your holocausts are not acceptable, nor are your sacrifices pleasing to me." Why not?

"Because they have not heard my words, and they have cast away my law" (Jer. 6: 20, 19). And again, by the prophet Isaias: "To what purpose do you offer me the multitude of your victims, saith the Lord? I am full. Offer sacrifice no more in vain; incense is an abomination to me. My soul hateth your solemnities: they are become troublesome to me, I am weary of bearing them. And when you stretch forth your hands, I will turn away my eyes from you. But if you wish your thanksofferings to be pleasing to me, wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from my eyes, cease to do perversely, learn to do well" (Is. 1: 11, 13, 17). Ask with the prophet Micheas: "What shall I offer to the Lord, that is worthy," for all the benefits God has showered down on me? Shall I kneel before the high God? Shall I offer holocausts unto him? (Is it enough for me to offer him a hundred Masses?) Shall I give my first-born, (and sacrifice him like Abraham?) All this will be of no good as a return for the benefits I have received, unless my heart is pure, and I am fully resigned to his holy will. "I will show thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requireth of thee." What is that? "Verily, to do judgment, and to love mercy, and to walk carefully with thy God" (Mich. 6: 6—8), and to love him above all things; in this true gratitude consists.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MOTIVES FOR LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR.

"*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" *Matt.* 22: 39.

This love of our neighbor is as rare among men as the love of God, even amongst those who imagine they love their neighbor. For in what narrow limits they confine that love! Friends, relations, benefactors, and those who agree with our opinions and suit our fancies, generally share all our love among them. All

others we look on as strangers; and if a work of Christian charity is required in their behalf, Oh, we think and say, what is the man to me? I do not know him; I owe him nothing; he has not deserved anything from me; I cannot bear him, nor suffer to be in his company. Christians! Is that not contrary to the words of the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," that is, all men, no matter who they are. Why so?

I. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, no matter who he is; because in himself he is worthy of your love.

II. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, no matter who he is; because Christ deserves that, for his sake, you should love your neighbor.

I. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor," O man! O Christian! that is, each and every one in the world without exception. Do you wish to know the reason why you should love him? No matter what his outward appearance may be, or his inward disposition; no matter how ragged, poor, lowly, abject, miserable, unknown he may seem, he is a living image of the mighty Monarch of heaven and earth; he has in his body a soul as beautiful as an angel, in which is reflected the likeness of God. That soul is an original of the God of infinite wisdom, knowledge, and power, nor has any one laid a hand on it but God himself, nor does it owe its origin to any one but God; it is made for nothing else but God; it has no other end and aim but God, no other resting-place but God, and expects no other reward but God. That soul is an original which cannot be bought or sold for any price less than the life blood of God. In what great honor and esteem the human soul must be held! Parents, be careful of the precious souls of your children, that they may not be lost forever! Christians, labor every day with the utmost diligence for the salvation of your immortal souls: for that is the only necessary business you have to attend to, as long as you are on this earth! Christians, I add as a conclusion to be drawn from this, honor and love your neighbor, who is such a beautiful image of God! For if a lifeless

picture, that is made of worthless colors, is esteemed and honored merely because it represents some great man or good friend, or because it is a celebrated work of art, what honor and love are not due to the master-piece of God's hand, which is a living image of God? When the young Tobias presented himself before Raguel, the latter, although he had never before seen him, at once received him with the utmost love and friendship, because he saw that his features resembled those of the elder Tobias, whom he loved dearly, not merely on account of relationship, but also on account of his excellent character. O Christians, when we consider our neighbor in the light of faith, we, too, must acknowledge and say: How like this man is to our God of infinite beauty! And when we have thus considered him, provided we love God, must we not confess that, on that account alone, there is not one in the world who is not worthy of esteem and love?

But there is a much closer connection and relationship between us, by which we are bound to love each other mutually. All *human beings are brothers and sisters;* we are all children of one father, not only because we are descended from the same father Adam, according to the flesh, but also because, by the far more excellent birth of the soul, we are children of our eternal Father, who is in heaven. "Have we not all one father?" said God by the prophet Malachy to the priests of the Old Law, who in their hearts despised the common people; "Hath not one God created us? Why, then, doth every one of us despise his brother?" (Malach. 2 : 10.) If men were bound to love each other with fraternal affection in the Old Law, what love and union are not required amongst us Christians by the New Law, that most perfect and all-holy law of love published by Jesus Christ? For we are born again in the blood of Christ, adopted as children of God, and thus related, we cry out unanimously to heaven, as our Saviour himself has taught us, as our elder Brother: "Our Father, who art in heaven." Nor does each one who prays say "my Father," but "our Father," so that, whenever we pray, we must remember that we are all brothers and sisters, who have the one heavenly Father. We do not say,

give me this day my daily bread; forgive me my trespasses; lead me not into temptation; deliver me from evil; but, give us our daily bread; forgive us our trespasses. Why? "We pray for all the people, because all the people are one," to show that we must foster a mutual love as if we were but one individual, and had but one heart, mind, and will; therefore, the good I wish myself I must also wish all others; and what I do not wish to happen to myself I must desire to avert from others, according to the practice of the early Christians: "And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul; neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but all things were common unto them" (Acts 4: 32).

That love and union of hearts should exist amongst us Christians, because we are all brothers and sisters, children of one Father, and also because we have only one mother, the holy Catholic Church, in and from which we receive spiritual life from God. For by Baptism we are born again in Christ, we are brought up from our youth in the holy doctrine and teaching of the Church, we are fed like comrades at the same table, and our food and drink is the precious, adorable flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.

And we are all travelling companions, who are going on the same road to the same fatherland, namely, to heaven, where our Almighty Father and many of our brothers and sisters, who have gone before, await us, that, being united with them in the most perfect love, we may enjoy the same inheritance with them, and possess the same eternal joys. The inheritance that children expect after the death of their parents in this life is often a cause of strife, disunion, and contention between brothers and sisters.

And is that to be wondered at; for since the amount to be left them is limited, the greater the number of children, the less the share that comes to each one, while, on the other hand, each wishes to have the best and largest share; thus arise envy and jealousy, quarrelling and contention, hatred and enmity, if there is only a suspicion that the inheritance is not fairly divided. But it is quite different with what we have to expect from our

Father in heaven ; for it is infinite and inexhaustible, and cannot be lessened or diminished by any number of claimants. Each one shall have as his portion the infinite God himself, whom we shall all possess together ; so that our inheritance shall be a bond to unite the hearts of the elect in intimate and joyful love. From this I conclude, that my neighbor, no matter who he may be, is worthy of my love, since he is a human being created for the same end as myself, to love me and be loved by me for all eternity.

Nay, should we not do that which is the cause of the utmost happiness to us here on earth ? For if each one loved his neighbor as himself, what a wonderful change there would be in the world ! Almost all vice would be abolished ; almost everything that troubles our heart and minds would be removed. Pride and vanity, which now make us seek and extol ourselves above others ; avarice and the concupiscence of the eyes, which are the cause of so many injustices on account of that wretched "mine and thine," and that occasions so much quarrelling and contention, the fruitful source of revengeful feelings, envy, jealousy, irreconcilable hatred, persecution; oppression, calumny, detraction, cursing, swearing, wars, and murders ; these capital sins, which are the sources and causes of all the troubles and trials of life, would all be removed, if Christian, brotherly love reigned in our hearts : each one would honor and esteem his neighbor as himself, would wish and do good to him as to himself, would rejoice at his prosperity as at his own, and help him in danger and necessity as he would wish to be helped himself. All would have the same wish without the least fear or suspicion of being envied, cheated, betrayed, or injured by another ; in a word, the world would become a picture of the future heavenly Jerusalem, which will be a dwelling of the most perfect repose, union, and peace ; because there the most perfect love will unite all hearts together.

Let us blot out all the other titles, that our being children of God, brothers and sisters of the same Father and Mother, comrades at table and travelling companions, co-heirs to the kingdom of heaven, and let us suppose, moreover, that there is absolutely

nothing in our neighbor to make him worthy of our love; Jesus Christ well deserves that for his sake we should love our neighbor.

II. Amongst all the commandments of God there is none that Jesus Christ took more interest in, or inculcated on all men more earnestly by word and example, than the law which commands us *to love our neighbor*.

1. He puts it in the same rank as the law that commands us to love our sovereign God. "Master," said the lawyer "which is the great commandment in the law?" And the answer was: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Christ makes, as it were, no distinction between the love of God and the love of our neighbor, although there is an infinite difference between God and man. He holds one love in as high esteem as the other, as if to say; to love God and to love your neighbor is the same thing in my eyes. Nay, it would seem as if the Apostle preferred to some extent the law of the love of our neighbor to that of the love of God, for he says that the whole law is fulfilled by him who loves his neighbor: "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law (Rom. 13 : 8). For all the law is fulfilled in one word: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'" (Gal. 5 : 14). The meaning of the Apostle is, not that a man who blasphemes God, swears falsely, does not observe the fast-days, still keeps the whole law if he only loves his neighbor, but that a man who, for God's sake, has a sincere love for his neighbor, will not offend the Lord by any kind of sin, so that he will keep all the other commandments as well. It is necessary for us to love our neighbor, as well as to love God. He wills us to love our neighbor for his sake; from which it follows that it is impossible for me to obey this command unless I love God. By the love of God the love of our neighbor is generated, and by the love of our neighbor the love of God is

nourished ; for he who neglects to love God is certainly unable to love his neighbor. And St. John says straight out that he who does not love his neighbor cannot love God : "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. And this commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God loves also his brother."

2. Again, Christ calls this commandment his commandment : "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you." Not that the fulfilment of the other points of the law is of no importance in his sight, or that he does not care if we keep the other commandments ; but he wishes to recommend this one commandment of love to us in a special manner, as the foundation of his holy Gospel, and an object most pleasing to his Sacred Heart ; not otherwise than as a father who has several children, says of one of them : this is his mother's son, but this is my son. He does not wish thereby to intimate that the other children are not his too ; his meaning is, that of all his children the one whom he thus singles out is his favorite, and the object of his special care. In the same sense, Christ says, "this is my commandment," the one which is dearest to me, "that you love one another." Therefore, when the disciples of St. John complained that they had always to hear the same exhortation from their master, "My little children, love one another," and they consequently desired something new, St. John said to them that he knew nothing better ; "for it is the precept of the Lord, and if it is observed, it will be enough."

3. Christ calls it a new law : "A new commandment I give unto you : that you love one another." But why does he say that ? This commandment is as old as the world ; for the law of nature bound the first men to brotherly love and friendly intercourse with one another ; while the law of Moses contains the express words : "Thou shalt love thy friend as thyself" (Lev. 19: 18): and at all times the law was : "Do unto others as you wish they should do unto you." Hatred, anger, vindictiveness, injustice,

detraction, contumely, cursing and swearing, deceit and treachery, are vices that were always forbidden. Meekness and charity, compassion for the miserable, generosity towards the poor, readiness to help others in their necessities, are virtues to which men were always bound. Why, then, does Christ say, as if he was bringing forward something novel, "A new commandment I give unto you : that you love one another ?" It is a new commandment, because it is to be kept in a new manner, on account of a new title, and a new motive. Our Lord's meaning was : hitherto you have received this commandment from God as your Creator and sovereign Lord, whom you are bound to obey, either through fear of eternal punishment, or through hope of an eternal reward ; but now I command you anew to love one another as your Redeemer, who will give my life's blood for you ; as your Brother, who will make you children of my Father, who has thus adopted you as my brethren with the prayer and the command that you love one another on my account and for my sake. And if hitherto neither the hope of reward, nor the fear of punishment, nor the authority of your Legislator could inspire you with that love, you should, at all events, practise it for the sake of the love that you owe your Redeemer and Saviour ; for I command you anew to love one another, and I enforce that commandment with all my authority : for my sake you must love one another.

4. We would do well to note the time and the circumstances in which he so specially inculcated this command on his disciples. When was it ? On the very night of the Last Supper, when he gave them his last will and testament. Before he went to his death he said to them : "These things I command, that you love one another" (John 15: 17). When a father is at the point of death, he calls his children to his bed-side to give them his last exhortations ; what he then says to them is generally what they are most inclined to observe ; and it remains, too, most deeply impressed on the memories of the children. Oh, they say, after ten or twenty years, or more, this or that was enjoined on me by my

father on his death-bed ; I must never forget it during my whole life ; I must faithfully observe it, and never act contrary to it. And if any one tries to hinder them from fulfilling their father's last words, they exclaim at once, "What ? Must I not do that which my dear father commanded me with his last breath ? Must I not observe the last injunction that he laid on me, when about to depart from this life ?" Now what should be the power of the last words of Christ with his heirs ? Love one another, he says, my children, do not forget it ; this is the commandment that I, your dying Father, give you ; this is the expression of my will before I am nailed to the cross for you : "These things I command you, that you love one another. "

5. The surest sign by which the disciple and follower of Christ is to be known is brotherly love : "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (John 13 : 34). He does not require miracles or prodigies ; but he says : "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." All other things are only deceitful signs of a disciple ; but this love is a true one and cannot deceive.

In return for the countless benefits that we have received and continue to receive from him, the only return of gratitude that our Lord requires of us is, that we should love our neighbor ; for he puts our neighbor in his own place, and says that whatever we do to him he shall accept it as if it were done to himself : "So long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25 : 40). He protests that he who injures his neighbor injures the apple of his eye, that is the tenderest and dearest member of his sacred body : "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye" (Zach. 2 : 8). On the last day Christ will forget everything that was done either to please or displease him, and will bring forward the works of charity that have been performed or omitted with regard to one's neighbor, as the sole reason for reward or punishment. "Come, ye blessed," he will say to the just, "possess the kingdom prepared for you." Why ? "For I was

hungry and you gave me to eat." "Depart from me, you cursed." Why? For I was hungry and you gave me not to eat. "So long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me."

Where are you now who so often say, when a work of charity is expected of you: What is the man to me? I do not know him; I owe him nothing: he has deserved nothing from me; I cannot bear him. What? Is, then, Jesus Christ nothing to you? Do you not know your Saviour? Do you owe him nothing? Has the Son of God deserved nothing from you? Can you not bear Jesus? You must know, then, that what you have given or refused to that man you have given or refused to Christ. Even if the man is not worthy of your love, certainly Jesus Christ deserves that you should love him for his sake. Depict your neighbor in the blackest colors; say that he is worthless, good-for-nothing, wicked man, whom no one can bear; say that he does all the mischief that lies in his power; no matter how you described him, it still remains true that Christ has said of him, that what you do to such a man you have done to himself; and, therefore, it is true, that Christ is well deserving that you should love even such a man for his sake.

"But before all things," I conclude in the words of St. Peter, "have a constant mutual charity among yourselves" (1 Pet. 4 : 8). Before all things, before all other works of devotion, before all that you do, be sure that you foster this mutual love. Your neighbor, as the image of God, as your brother, as your comrade and travelling companion, as your co-heir to the kingdom of heaven, is well deserving of that love. Love one another; it is the command of the Lord, the special and dearest law of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who has commanded us to love our neighbor in his place, and who will give us a clear receipt for all we owe him, if we only love our neighbor. Amen.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE WAY AND MANNER IN WHICH WE SHOULD LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR.

"*And Jesus seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: Be of good heart, son.*" *Matt.* 9 : 2.

Behold the brilliant example of the sincere love of our neighbor given us in Jesus Christ, who comforted and healed the paralytic as soon as he saw the thoughts of those who brought the poor man to him, and before they had spoken a single word to him: And consider how meekly he answers the envious Scribes and Pharisees, who were watching all his actions out of hatred, and were decrying him as a blasphemer, when he could easily have punished them! Thirdly, there was no one present who did not experience his love and beneficence: he healed the paralytic man; he filled with consolation the man's friends who had brought him; he proved his divinity to the Scribes and Pharisees by working a miracle, and he moved all who were present to acknowledge God, to adore and praise him: See how general was the love of Jesus Christ; and from this, too, we learn how we should love our neighbor according to the express command of our Lord: "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15 : 12).

I. Christ has loved us mortals with a patient, meek love; such should be also the nature of our love for our neighbor.

II. Christ has loved us mortals with a beneficent love; such should be our love for our neighbor.

III. Christ has loved us mortals with a general love; such should be our love for our neighbor.

I. Christ said of Himself: "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. 11 : 29). It teaches us what the nature for our love for our neighbor should be; namely, that it must

be a meek love, by which we bear with one another's faults and failings, and suffer in a patient and friendly spirit what might otherwise cause us to feel hurt and annoyed. If we had to live only with Angels, who are not subject to bad temper, to sin, nor to any other fault, then there would be no room for meek and patient love on earth, patience and meekness would be without merit, and no virtue. But as it is, we are bound to love all men, and, in the manner in which he has loved us; and at the same time we must live and deal with people who have peculiar imaginations and dispositions, and are full of rash judgments, of faults and imperfections, just as we ourselves have our faults. The one is proud, the other clownish; one is too sharp, the other too stupid and simple; one is of a passionate and hasty disposition, the other, melancholy and peevish; one is too sensitive and quarrelsome, the other, too obstinate and headstrong; every one has his faults. To try to amend them all would be vain labor: it is not in our power to make people faultless. To preserve peace and brotherly love, all we can do is to be patient and meek in bearing with our neighbor's disagreeable qualities, as St. Paul says: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6: 2). Oh, if all only had that love, what a change there would be! What a happy place the world would then become!

How is it with me in this respect? So should each one ask himself. Has my love for my neighbor hitherto been a meek, patient love? Have I learned to bear patiently and meekly the faults and failings of others? They have to bear with mine; so that it would be an injustice for me to expect them to bear a hundred faults in me, while I am unwilling to overlook the least short-coming in them. And yet, have I not often been guilty of this injustice? How often, instead of acting in a friendly manner towards my neighbor, have I not shunned and avoided him? When he came in by one door, I went out by the other, because I could not bear his manner or behavior, because he had some natural defect that seemed intolerable to me, although he was not to blame for it. How often, when I could not avoid his company,

have I not given expression to my dissatisfaction by an unfriendly countenance, by sour looks, and other signs of secret contempt? I have acted towards him as Joseph's brethren did towards their innocent brother; I could not speak a friendly word to him, nor look at him in any but a hostile manner. How often have I not addressed him in a harsh, overbearing manner? How often have I not complained to others of his bad temper and natural faults, and said that it was an intolerable thing for me to have to do with such a man? If I succeeded in overcoming myself for a time for God's sake, and concealed my dislike for him so far as to meet him in a friendly manner, I still felt a secret joy when others noticed or found fault with his defects. And all this came from a want of meekness and patience in bearing with his faults.

Alas, I am thus driven to the conclusion that the love I have had for my neighbor has been altogether unlike that which Jesus Christ had for us; that the true love which he requires has as yet found no place in my heart, and that the many protestations I made to God in prayer, offering to bear with my neighbor's faults, were only empty forms without meaning. For I have not had patience or meekness enough to overlook even one of his faults, or to bear a single word of contradiction from him. Yet, even if I had not been wanting in patience and meekness, I should still have had but one quality of sincere love, which must not merely exist in the heart, but also show itself in work.

II. The same love that made Jesus Christ bear so meekly and patiently the imperfections of those with whom he had to do, and the terrible torments and insults heaped upon him by the Jews and wicked soldiers, the same love, I say, moved him to use all his divine power to do good to men: "Who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38), as the Scripture says of him. He wandered through towns and villages, forests and deserts, seeking whom he might benefit. He drove the evil spirits from the possessed, comforted the afflicted, fed the hungry, healed the sick, cleansed lepers, raised the dead to life, sought out and converted sinners.

He entered into the houses of sinners, sat down to table with them, and made no account of the wicked things that were said of him, as long as he had an opportunity of showing his generous love to man. In a word, all his thoughts, words, actions, and every step and movement he made, from the first moment of his Incarnation to his last breath on the cross, was intended for nothing else but our eternal welfare: "For us men and for our salvation." Nay, he seemed to forget himself that he might do good to others. How many miracles did he not work to help them in their necessities, and free them from their miseries! But what did he do when he himself was in the greatest straits? When he was fasting forty days and nights in the desert, and was hungry, he could easily have turned stones into bread, or water into wine, to refresh himself. But he did not work such miracles for himself: they were for the good of others. When the wine failed at the marriage feast of Cana, he could work a miracle. "I have compassion on the multitude, for behold, they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat" (John 8. 2). And to help them, he miraculously multiplied a few loaves, so that they all had enough. The same pity induced him to change water into wine at Cana. When he was seized by the soldiers and taken prisoner in the garden of Gethsemani, it would have been easy for him to tear asunder his bonds, and free himself from their hands. But no; his only care was that his disciples should be suffered to go unharmed; if you seek me, he said, here I am; drag me forth if you will; but one thing I command you, let these go in peace: "Jesus answered: I have told you that I am he; if, therefore, you seek me, let those go their way" (John 18: 8). With reason does St. Peter Chrysologus say, considering these words: "Christ is a man for himself, a God for me." That is, for the love of others he was an all-powerful God to help them in their necessities and work miracles for them; but when there was question of himself, he was, as it were, a weak man.

O Christians! hear again those words: "This is my commandment: that you love one another;" such, too, should be the

nature of your love. That is what St. John, the beloved disciple, seeks to inculcate on us in the words of his first epistle: "My dearest, if God hath so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (John 4 : 11). "Be ye, therefore, followers of God," says St. Paul, "as most dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us" (Ephes. 5: 1,2). How can we love our neighbor as he did? Ah, methinks I hear our Lord answering: Can you not, then, do good to one another without working miracles? Have you not every day a thousand opportunities of showing kindness to one another? Are there not beggars enough crying for alms either in the public streets or at your doors? Are there not decent poor enough, who have to work hard and yet can hardly manage to support themselves and their children, who are ashamed to beg, although they are far more deserving of alms than public beggars? If you cannot multiply bread for them, you can, at least, help them now and then with your bread and money. Are there not desolate sick people in your neighborhood? If you cannot restore them to health, you can, at all events, visit them, and do what your means will allow for them. Are there not afflicted people enough who groan and sigh under the pressure of misfortune without help or consolation? If you are not able to free them from their troubles, you can, at least, frequently address a word of comfort to them, and say a word in their favor when you get the chance. Daily there are people, known and unknown, neighbors, friends, domestics, whom you can serve in different ways by acts of love and kindness. In these, then, countless similar circumstances, you can and should, according to the example I have given you, prove your beneficent love for your neighbor.

But, alas! have I not always done quite the contrary? Instead of wishing and doing good to my neighbor, through fraternal affection, as to myself, how often have I not done him harm, and caused him sorrow and affliction? How often have I not wished evil to him, and rejoiced when he suffered misfortune or loss? How often have I not been disturbed and displeased, through envy and jealousy, at his good fortune or success? How often have I

not tried through hatred to hinder those who were about to render him a service? How often have I not tried to run him down before others, by speaking evil of him? How often have I not turned away the poor from my door in a rude and harsh manner, instead of giving them alms? How often have I not added to the troubles of poor widows and orphans, instead of taking an active interest in their welfare? How often have I not been harsh and cruel to my servants, nay, even to my wife and children, to whom I owe the greatest love and kindness? Truly I have nothing of the true spirit of the love of Jesus Christ! And what judgment must I form of myself, when I consider the third quality of this love; namely, that it must be general, like the love that Jesus Christ had for us?

III. General love consists in this, that it extends itself to all men, without exception. Such was the love of Jesus Christ. He came down from heaven on earth and took human nature on himself, in order to save all men from hell, and to make them eternally happy. Therefore he gave himself to all, without exception; Jews and heathens, great and small, rich and poor, young and old, received from him the same instruction and doctrine, the same remedies for body and soul. He was never deterred by the want and poverty of the one nor unduly influenced by the wealth and authority of the other. No one was too mean in his sight, no one too unknown or strange, nay, no sinner too wicked to be offered his favor and plentiful grace. Even to those who openly declared themselves as his sworn enemies he was willing to do good and to give grace; he invited them to come to him for that purpose, and called out to them in the most friendly terms. He sought them diligently, and often wept, bitterly, with heartfelt pity for those who, through wickedness and obstinacy, refused to receive his grace.

"This is my commandment: that you love one another, as I have loved you." If your love for your fellow-men is not great enough to impel you to love all without exception, then you have not a true Christian love, but a mere hypocritical one; for the mo-

tive that should induce you to love your neighbor is the fact that he is the image of God, your brother, your comrade, your travelling companion, your co-heir to heaven, and because Christ wishes you to love him. But this motive is not limited to a few ; it holds good for all men ; and, therefore, you cannot have a true love for one man without loving all. And just as it is a false repentance to say, I am sorry for having stolen, because I have offended my God thereby, but I am not sorry for having committed a sin of impurity, since the offence against God is the general motive of repentance for all sin ; in the same way, it is a false love to say : I love that man, because he is an image of God, my brother, my comrade, my travelling campanion, my co-heir, and because Christ wishes me to love him ; but I do not love that other, and cannot bear the sight of him nor wish him well. When our Lord published the law commanding us to love our enemies, just as our heavenly Father causes his sun to shine on the good and the wicked, and pours down his rain on the just and unjust, he adds : "For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this ? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more ? Do not also the heathens this ?" (Matt. 5: 46,47.) If you love only certain persons to whom you are drawn by a natural inclination ; if you do good, and are inclined to do good, only to those who are agreeable to you, or who are closely connected with or related to you, or from whom you expect something in return ; "do not also the heathens this ?" And how, then, could you be distinguished from the heathen and the Turk ? Even amongst the wildest barbarians, there are friends who love each other. Therefore I say to you : "Love your enemies ; do good to them that hate you ; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you ; that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5: 44,45).

How sublime and perfect is this love ! But, at the same time, how rare it is in the world ! Do we not now live in those unhappy days of which our Lord has prophesied, that when they come the charity of many shall grow cold ? "And then shall many be scan-

dalized, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And because iniquity hath abounded, the charity of many shall grow cold" (Matt.24. 10, 12). Alas, it is already growing only too cold amongst us, so narrow are the limits in which it is circumscribed! We have certain likes and dislikes, and according to them we act towards our fellow-man. We have special friends for whom we spare neither money, nor services, nor trouble, nor labor; but for others we have nothing, know nothing, do nothing. One loves, because he is loved in return; another, because he is honored; a third, because he has received a benefit; a fourth, because he hopes for some good thing; nearly all love on account of their own advantage. But you will with difficulty find any one to love his neighbor for Christ's sake. The rich despise and contemn the poor; although we are all made by our Creator of the same clay; although we are all made to the image of God, and are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ and co-heirs to the same heaven; and therefore our love for one another should be general according to the express command of our Lord. With regard to the beneficent love of one's enemies and of those who have injured us, we must not dare to say a word about it to most people. They would look on it as an utter impossibility, although that commandment is laid upon us by the Son of God, who does not order us to do impossible things; and that, too, under pain of eternal damnation. O charity of Jesus Christ! where art thou? It is only to be found in some pious souls, whose example God allows us to see for our edification, although there are few who follow it.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE REASONS FOR FRATERNAL CORRECTION.

"Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a wedding garment?" Matt. 22 : 12.

Truly, some of the many guests must have noticed that this poor man was not clad in a seemly fashion? Why, then, did no one take the trouble of reminding him in a friendly manner, and warning him to change before the king should come in? If that had been done, the wretched man would have had time to go home and put on something better, if he had it; and thus he would have avoided the great misfortune of being cast into the exterior darkness. But this is only a parable, and not history; if the thing had happened in reality, who knows how the guests would have behaved? Oh, how many there are who daily lose by their sins and vices the precious wedding-garment of sanctifying grace! How many are cast into the exterior darkness of hell who would have amended their evil ways, and escaped those eternal flames, if only they had had some zealous lovers of souls to give them a friendly warning and admonish them fraternally to amend their lives!—a thing we might often do, if we only had the good will. But most people do not think of this. And yet it is a duty required of us all by the love of God and the love of our neighbor. But in what manner should fraternal correction be given and in what manner taken? The reasons for fraternal correction are, the love of God and the love of our neighbor.

I. The love of God requires it;
II. The love of our neighbor requires it.

Fraternal correction means an admonition of our neighbor with the intention of inducing him to avoid evil or to do good. To this correction we are all bound, due proportion being observed,

according to our different states and opportunities. If there were no special command given us to this effect; if there were no evangelical counsel to exhort us to it; if it were left altogether to our own choice, still a sincere love of God would certainly impel us to practise fraternal correction. For if I love my friend truly, I rejoice in his welfare, and sympathize with his sorrows and misfortunes, while I spare no efforts to save him from evil. The fact of his being my friend is enough to make me abhor the idea of his incurring misfortune, or suffering harm. Now, the greatest evil, the worst harm, the greatest injury and insult, the worst misfortune that can be inflicted by his creatures on our Lord and God, who is infinitely happy in himself, is sin alone, by which he is dishonored, despised, contemned, and grievously offended. Sin is an act of rebellion on the part of the creature against the Creator; an odious ingratitude towards the God of infinite goodness; an act of hatred and wrath against the God of infinite beauty; a defiance and mockery to the very face of the God who is present everywhere; a shameful abuse of the divine coöperation, for God is forced, as it were, against his will to take part in the offence offered himself, inasmuch as he must help to perform the sinful act; it is a shameful rejection of God, of that sovereign Good worthy of all love, and a selling of ourselves to the devil forever for some wretched thing. Sin, as far as it can, attempts the life of the eternal God, and crucifies anew the Son of God, our Saviour who is now reigning in glory. And if an insult of that kind is offered the Almighty in my presence, can I look on with dry eyes, with speechless mouth, with an unchanged countenance, with an undisturbed heart? Should I tolerate that injustice, and not hinder it, if I can, by admonition, exhortation, correction, or complaining of it to others? If so, I should not be worthy of being called a child, a friend, a servant, a creature of God, or, at all events, it would not be true for me to say that I love my God, as I am bound to love him, with my whole heart, my whole mind, and all my strength.

What should we think of a son who looks on while his father

is being maltreated by some wicked fellow, and stands there quietly while he is being kicked and buffeted, and does not make the least effort to help him, although he could easily do so? We should say that that son is undutiful, and unworthy of having an honorable man as his father. It is an indelible disgrace to the memory of the emperor Gallienus that, when he heard that his father was taken prisoner by the Parthians, he showed neither anger against the barbarians nor sympathy for his father; but without deigning to say a word by way of answer to the messenger who brought him the news, as if it were of no concern to him, turned to a friend and asked him what he was to have for dinner on that day. To know that his father was in prison, and yet not testify grief thereat, nor declare war on those who had captured him, is a most cruel and unworthy act on the part of a son. In such circumstances, a dutiful son would find in his respect and love for his father a superhuman strength, so that he would be ready to dare wounds, and even death itself, in his efforts to free his beloved parent. Atus, the son of Crœsus, was born dumb and remained so, until excitement at a sudden danger, in which his father was, loosened the string of his tongue: Crœsus was attacked by a man with a drawn sword, who was about to pierce his heart, when Atus cried out: "O man, slay not my father!" O Christians, is not the Lord God our Father, our most faithful and loving Father, who has not his like upon earth; to whom we pray daily, "Our Father who art in heaven;" who shows us his fatherly love by heaping benefits on us every moment? And we, who say we are his children, see and hear daily the sins and vices with which men treat him so unbecomingly; we see and hear their uncharitable talk, their swearing and cursing, by which they publicly insult the Almighty, again crucify and slay him; and shall we tolerate that? Shall we look on coldly, and not rather do our best to put a stop to it? Should we not cry out to the malefactors, "O man, slay not my father"? What are you doing? Why do you speak and act in such a manner? Do not slay our heavenly Father! But if we neglect to do this, especially when there is a

hope of our doing some good thereby, is it possible that we have still a child-like love of God in our hearts?

There is no one who has not some friend to whom he is attached; now, I ask, if that friend were insulted, despised, and ill-treated, would not any honorable man be hurt and afflicted, if he were looking on? Would he not feel angry with the person who thus misuses his friend, and try to prevent him by every means in his power? We ourselves are so sensitive that a word is sometimes enough to put us in a passion, so that we can hardly restrain ourselves from taking revenge if we have the opportunity. Should we not have the same feelings at the sight of the injuries that are offered to God, from whom we have received all the good things we possess, who is our best Friend, and whom we must love more than ourselves? The great God who is not at all in need of our services, is so jealous of our honor and welfare, if we only love him, that he takes to himself all the injuries that others do us. "Amen, I say to you," he exclaims, "as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25 : 40). Nay, he says even: "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye" (Zach 2 : 8), and threatens the eternal flames of hell to those who dare to nourish hatred and anger against one of his servants.

II. If I can save my neighbor from some great danger, misfortune, or calamity, without any great loss to myself, there is no doubt that the law of charity binds me to do so under pain of sin, even if the man were nothing to me otherwise. Thus, if I were to refuse a piece of bread, that I can easily spare, to a man who is on the point of dying of hunger, or not to help out of a pit one who has fallen into it, and whom I can save by merely stretching out my hand to him, or not to give due warning to a blind man whom I see to be in imminent danger of falling over a precipice, who would say that, in such circumstances, I am free from a sin of cruelty and want of charity? I should evidently act against the fundamental law: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" for if

I were in similar circumstances I should reasonably wish some one to help or warn, or pull me out of the pit, or save me from dying of hunger.

Now, if the law of Christian charity requires of each one to help his neighbor if he can when the latter is suffering from danger, want—how much more does not the same law require us to help our neighbor in that utmost danger and necessity of the soul, on which all depends, and to try to save him, if possible, from the wretched state in which he is? And that can be done, and without any harm to us, nay, to the great merit of our souls, by fraternal correction, admonition, and reproof, as Christ tells us "If thy brother shall offend against thee, go and rebuke him;" act the apostle towards him; admonish and reprove him. What will be the consequence? "If he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother" (Matt. 18 : 15). Oh, what an act of charity! to have saved the soul of one's brother! to have saved a soul, that is more precious in the sight of God than all the treasures of earth, which have been created by God for the sole purpose of saving souls! to have saved a soul, a precious pearl, for the sake of which the Eternal Son of God left all that is in heaven, came down upon earth, and labored hard for thirty-three years! What a gain to prevent that soul from being condemned to curse and blaspheme its God forever; to help it to love, praise, and bless him for eternity in heaven! No sacrifice is so grateful to God as zeal for souls. To pray, fast, distribute our goods to the poor, build churches and temples to the great God, and found hospitals for the sick and refuges for the poor, are indeed meritorious and holy works in the sight of God; but to save even one soul is a work of charity which far surpasses all the others in greatness and merit. Although you may give immense sums of money to the poor, you will do a great deal more by converting one soul. For he who gives money to a poor man appeases his hunger; but he who corrects a sinner hinders him from committing sin. In the one case, the body is saved from the pangs of hunger; in the other, the soul is saved from the flames of hell. "My brethren," cries out

St. James, "if any of you err from the truth, and one convert him, he must know that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins" (James 5: 19, 20).

It was this consideration that made the Apostles and their successors travel through the whole world, preaching the Gospel, and filled them with indescribable consolation and joy, in the midst of their many trials and sufferings. If they had been asked what was the reason of the incessant labors they undertook, of their unwearied activity, they would have answered that it was to gain the precious souls of their brethren that were redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, for the sake of which they would be quite ready to sacrifice their comfort and convenience, their honor and good name, their health and their lives, and, moreover, to undergo public disgrace and all the torments of martyrdom. This was the gain that Jesus Christ himself sought as the reward of all his labor, and of the bitter death he suffered on the cross, as he himself says: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19 : 40).

If we cannot with the Apostles and apostolic men go about the world to convert the souls of our brethren and win them over to God, yet we have many an opportunity of showing zeal for souls by hindering, lessening, and decreasing the number of our neighbor's sins, by fraternal correction and admonition. We see and hear daily that the great God is offended by many sins; that the precious souls of our fellow-mortals are hurried on in swarms to eternal ruin; and although we might sometimes hinder that to a great extent, we do not take trouble to do so; it gives us as little concern as if a cat or a dog were falling into a pit.

Ah, would to God that there were not to be found in such great numbers those murderers of souls who, instead of endeavoring to further the honor of God and their neighbor's salvation, seem to devote all their efforts to extending the kingdom of the devil and bringing other souls along with their own to hell! By their impure talk, and the indecent pictures they expose publicly, or by

reading bad books, or dressing in a scandalous manner, they are to many an innocent soul the occasion of sinful thoughts and desires. They act as go-betweens to encourage an impure passion; they are teachers of the devil's school, who endeavor by ridicule, and even threats, to turn away from their devotions the pious who otherwise have no sympathy with their evil ways; nay, even parents are sometimes guilty in this respect, by not tolerating innocence and piety in their children, and by acting as devil's agents to corrupt the innocent by word and example. O scandal-givers! O betrayers of souls! see how terribly you sin against the love of God and your neighbor! Woe to you when the angry God will demand of you the souls that you have ruined! when that curse shall fall upon you which Jesus Christ has uttered against all who give scandal: "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!"

Let us resolve, never in future to allow an opportunity of hindering evil or doing good to pass by, when we have any hope that our warnings or admonitions will be effectual. Let us prove that we love our God, not merely with the lips, but in reality, with our whole hearts, since we thus take an active interest in furthering his honor and preventing sin. Let us show thereby that we love our neighbor, not merely with the lips, but with the heart and sincerely, since we thus try to save the souls of our brothers and sisters from hell, and to bring them with us to heaven, where our joy and glory will be all the greater, the more companions we have with us to show us eternal gratitude for the love we had for their souls, and to join with us in praising God forever. Amen.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE DUTY OF FRATERNAL CORRECTION.

"*He went to him, and prayed him to come down and heal his son.*"
John 4 : 47.

It is no wonder that this man was so anxious for the recovery of the sick person, who was his own son; but why did he come himself? for he was a great man, a ruler, and could have sent one of his servants to our Lord to ask him to heal his son? But no, he was not satisfied unless he came himself, for his fatherly love would not let him rest otherwise. And according to his wish and desire he heard from our Lord the consoling words: "Go thy way, thy son liveth." I have already begun to speak of fraternal correction, by which the souls of our fellow-men, sick and dying through sin, can be saved from death and restored to health. I have shown how that correction is required of us by the love of God and the love of our neighbor. But unfortunately in this matter we are as if we were dumb, or as if our neighbor's welfare did not concern us. Yet it does concern us, and we are bound to further it under pain of sin, as I shall now show.

I. Many are bound by justice under pain of sin to fraternal correction.
II. All are bound to it occasionally by a special law of God.

I. Everyone is bound in justice to keep to the terms of the contract he has made. Thus, if I were surety for your debtor, I should be bound to do my best to enable you to have the money that is due to you. A steward or servant who has agreed with you for a yearly wage is bound to look after your property and your house, and justice requires him to take all possible care to

make your property as profitable as possible and prevent it from being injured by theft or otherwise. He who has undertaken to keep your money, or money's worth, safe for you, is bound to do all he can to prevent it from being lost.

Now, there are many men in the world who, by virtue of their office or position, have entered on a tacit agreement with God by which they bind themselves to look after the welfare of certain souls as best they can, in order to prevent them from being lost forever. Who are they? All superiors, whether lay or ecclesiastical, who have to protect the interests of their subjects in towns or villages: such as parish priests and those who have a care of souls with regard to their parishoners; teachers with regard to their pupils; parents with regard to their sons and daughters; masters and mistresses with regard to their servants and other domestics; husbands with regard to their wives; in a word, all those who have any position of superiority or authority over others. When entering on their state or occupation they made a tacit contract with God by which they took upon themselves the care of their subjects, as sureties, stewards, and depositaries of God, binding themselves thereby to use all possible diligence to lead on their subjects to good, to keep them from evil, and to induce them to amend their lives if they are in sin.

Therefore they are bound in justice not only to admonish, warn, and exhort in a fatherly manner those subjects of theirs whom they see to be in sin or in the danger of sin, but also to reprove and punish them if warnings or threats have proved unavailing; so that they who are careless or forgetful of this duty are guilty of all the sins and vices that they failed to correct and prevent in their subjects. We are just as guilty as if we ourselves committed the sinful act; for he who does not correct what should be corrected is guilty of the sin. And God will one day require the souls of those subjects at our hands, as he himself says: "At the hand of man, at the hand of every man, and of his brother will I require the life of man"(Gen. 9 : 5).

And this is perfectly just; for it is a recognized practice even

in worldly concerns. If your debtor has run through his property, and has become unable to pay what he owes you, you look to the person who went surety for him, to see that you get what you have a right to; nor can the latter shirk the obligation, for he should have looked better after the man for whom he went surety, and not suffered him to live so extravagantly. If the money you have deposited with another is stolen, or the property you have left in his care injured, then he who undertook the care of it is bound to make restitution to you out of his own goods, if the theft can be traced to any wilful and gross carelessness on his part. Why so? He has not stolen your property, nor received a single penny of your money. No matter; he was not diligent in keeping it, as he was bound to be by the contract he entered into; and on account of this carelessness he is bound in conscience to indemnify you out of his own goods. In your absence you have entrusted your house and shop to your servant; the servant finds a comfortable seat, and goes to sleep with the door open, so that thieves get into your shop and run off with what they can lay hands on. What will you say to that when you come back? What will you think of your servant when you find out how he has looked after your property? It does not take you long to consider about that! You worthless fellow! you say to him; make good what was lost through your laziness, or else you will soon become acquainted with the inside of a prison, to teach you, and all like you, how to mind your business. But why are you so strict with the poor man? Is that right on your part? What harm has he done? He only fell asleep, and there is surely no great harm in that? Yes, you answer; but he should have looked after my house and property better; I hired him for that purpose; and therefore he should either have shut the door or else kept his eyes open; his going to sleep was the cause of the robbery; therefore he must either pay me or go to prison. And you are perfectly right, nor can any one find fault with your mode of acting under the circumstances.

Suppose that you are well off, and that you undertake to be

surety with a man for his debtor. While you are signing the agreement, oh, how friendly the man is to you! He is as polite and cordial as if you were his dearest friend. But wait a little; when the time has elapsed, and the debtor is unable to meet his obligation; what then? Oh, then the creditor acts quite differently; he sends word to you at once, and lets you know that you have to pay. The time is up, he says; you went bail for that man; give me now what he owes me. And if you do not pay immediately he sends the officers of justice to your house to take possession of your property, and tries by every means to compel you to pay the debt. Why has he changed so suddenly in your regard? At first he was quite friendly to you; he spoke kindly and was most cordial. Yes, but then he is not now; things are seen in a different light now that the time for payment has come. He is quite a stranger to you; he knows you no longer, unless in so far as he is determined to exact his own from you to the last farthing. So will Christ act with those who by their state or office have charge of the souls of others. Christ is called a stranger, because although he is a friend at the time of the agreement, when one undertakes the charge of the souls of others, "He is a stranger when the day of reckoning comes," if the duty has not been properly performed. St. Thomas. Therefore, "my son, if thou be surety" waken up the souls entrusted to you; admonish, reprove them if they have done evil or are in danger. Do not go asleep over your weighty charge, be not negligent; save them from the danger, that you may not have to pay for them one day with your own soul.

But alas, how few care about this! How carelessly most people perform their duty in this respect! How many there are who go to sleep, and let thieves enter into the house of God, and have neither eyes to watch over the souls entrusted to them, nor tongues to warn them, nor hands to punish them when necessary? Public abuses, scandals, sins, and vices, are sometimes allowed loose rein in a community, and thereby many souls are betrayed and ruined; while those who could and ought to speak in order to prevent the mischief have not courage to open their mouths;

they act as if they were asleep, and allow the temples of God, precious souls, to be robbed and plundered.

Alas, how will they fare when Christ will appear to them as a stranger, and demand an account of the souls that they thus allowed to slip through their hands? To no purpose will they try to excuse themselves by saying: but I have done no harm; I did not lead those under my care into the vices to which they abandoned themselves; I did not tell my servants to swear, or curse, or not to go to church, or to frequent bad company, or to cultivate dangerous intimacies; I did not advise my children to lead idle, useless lives; nor was I pleased to see my wife neglecting her house duties, and squandering our income so foolishly. I neither taught them those evil habits nor did I give them bad example; how, then, can I be accountable for their sins? Ah, that you will soon see! Neither did that surety tell the debtor to squander away his property; he would far rather have seen him able to pay what he owed. The servant who went asleep in the shop did not invite the thief to come in, nor did he show him the goods or ask him to steal them; he would have been far better pleased if the thief had remained away altogether. But he slept when he should have remained awake; and that alone is enough reason for having him punished. All those who have charge of the souls of others, especially masters and parents, need of a certainty commit no other sin to lose their own souls than that neglect of paternal vigilance and correction. A good thing for me, perhaps some will now say, that I am not a superior, or pastor of souls, or preacher, or master, or father, or mother; I have only myself to look after and be responsible for; so that I am free from that duty and need not trouble about rendering any account for not having admonished or corrected others. True, you are not so strictly bound in justice as those others are; yet do not be in too great a hurry to conclude that you are free from every obligation in that respect. Whoever you may be, you are bound under sin according to your ability and opportunity, to fraternal correction, by a special law of God, which he has imposed on all men.

II. It is certain and undoubted that it is the will of God that all sins and vices should be corrected and reproved, in whatever manner it may be done. Now, superiors, parents, and pastors of souls have authority in this way over their own subjects alone, and not over others; neither can they know everything nor find out always where sin is committed. There are millions of sins committed behind their backs that they can know nothing about, and therefore cannot prevent by correction. Hence it is clearly the will of God that all men should perform this duty with regard to each other, and try to help one another to the best of their ability to avoid sin and to amend their lives. Such is the meaning of the words: "He gave to every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor" (Ecclus. 17:12). "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and thou shalt say to them; thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; but reprove him openly, lest thou incur sin through him" (Levit. 29: 2, 17). "Reprove a friend, lest he may not have understood, and say, I did it not; or if he did it, that he may do it no more. Admonish thy friend, for there is often a fault committed. Admonish thy neighbor before thou threaten him, and give place to the fear of the Most High" (Ecclus. 19: 13–18).

Christ expressly commands us: "If thy brother sin against thee, reprove him" (Luke 17:3). That is, if he sins to thy knowledge, or in thy presence, reprove him. "If thy brother shall offend against thee, go and rebuke him between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother; and if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more. And if he will not hear them, tell the Church" (Matt. 18:15, 17). If he will not hear you, tell those who have more authority over him. Hence we are bound to practise fraternal correction, not by a mere counsel, but by a law which obliges us under sin; and he who does not try to correct his neighbor whom he sees doing wrong becomes a participator in his guilt. He who can correct and neglects doing so, certainly participates in the sin.

Now come forward all you who, when there is question of

fraternal correction, have in your hearts or on your lips the words of Cain : "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4 : 9.) What have I to do with others? I have to look out for myself ; it is my own soul that I must try to bring to heaven ; let others try to do the same for themselves ; let each one bear his own burthen and account for his own actions ; I have enough to do to mind myself, and I find so many faults and failings in myself that I have neither time nor inclination to trouble myself about those of others. What is it to me? Ah, fine talk that! What a pity you do not speak and think in that way when you indulge your curiosity about the actions of others, and by rash judgments and unfounded suspicions put the worst construction on them! What is it to me? I have to look out for my own soul. So should you think and say when you backbite your neighbor, or listen eagerly to uncharitable conversation ; when you talk about faults that you merely suspect in him, or make his secret faults the subject of ridicule and laughter, causing them to appear much worse than they are in reality. What is it to me? What have I to do with others? So should you think and say when you speak of the known sins of your neighbor to those who cannot correct him, and do that through hatred, dislike, vindictiveness, because he has done you some injury, or out of mere talkativeness. That would be the time for you to say : what is it to me? I have nothing to do with others, I must look after myself and my own soul. Fraternal correction does not require such spying, detraction, talking, and fault-finding. No ; such prying and idle talk does not prevent sin, but rather increases it ; it does not gain the souls of our brethren, but rather takes away their good name and reputation. But when opportunity offers to give your neighbor a wholesome admonition, when you see or know of him doing wrong, to warn him charitably, to keep him away from evil, and give him a mild reproof if you reasonably hope that it will do him good, that is what concerns you and all men, and what the express laws of God, and the good of souls require.

Therefore if your brother sins, go and rebuke him. Each one

will find opportunities enough of doing this, provided he wishes to help his neighbor to amend. Remember how often you have given others scandal and been the occasion of sin to them, thus helping in the ruin of souls. That consideration alone should be sufficient to induce you to be all the more zealous in atoning for the harm you have done and in gaining new souls to God. Consider the example of St. Paul. After his conversion he hardly took time to refresh his body, emaciated as it was by a three days' fast, but at once set about the work of converting sinners to Christ; he who before was a persecutor, as soon as he became a Christian himself, began without delay to induce others to follow his example: "And immediately he preached Jesus in the synagogues, that he is the son of God" (Acts 9 : 20). We have another example in David. When he had repented of his sins his first resolution was to become a teacher and an apostle, to warn others from following the broad road of vice, and to lead them to God: "I will teach the unjust thy ways; and the wicked shall be converted to thee" (Ps. 1 : 15). This was what our Lord said to St. Peter, after having foretold his lamentable fall: "And thou being once converted, confirm thy brethren" (Luke 22 : 32). His meaning was: thou wilt indeed rise after thy fall; but remember, at the same time, that thou art bound to help thy brethren, and to sustain them by word and example. Follow these examples, and you will atone to God for your former faults.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE MANNER IN WHICH FRATERNAL CORRECTION SHOULD BE ADMINISTERED.

"*And his lord being angry, delivered him to the torturers.*" *Matt.* 18 : 34.

We have hitherto treated of fraternal correction, by which we can help our neighbor to avoid sin and amend his life; and I

have shown, in the first place, that it is required of each one by the love of God and the love of our neighbor; while, in the second place, I have proved that we are bound to it under pain of sin; many in justice, all by virtue of a special law of God. Now, the question is, how should one, who is concerned for the divine honor and his neighbor's welfare, act when he has to administer fraternal correction or admonition, so that he may attain his end, and not make matters worse instead of better. We can learn that from the Lord in the Gospel; namely, we must not be too harsh and severe to our neighbor at first, but warn him in a friendly manner, and, if he promises to amend, show a brotherly sympathy for him; but if we see that it is necessary, and that the promised amendment does not follow, we should reprove him with a holy anger. This is what I intend to explain in to-day's instruction.

How we should fraternally admonish and correct others.

If a doctor were to treat all his patients in the same way, and to give them all the same medicine, it would be an evident sign that he knows little of his profession, and we should expect him to kill more of his patients than he would cure. Would you like to trust such a doctor as that? I should think not; for what is good for one kind of illness is bad for another; what will cure one man who has a fever might bring to the grave another who has the very same fever. No, a good doctor must have a clear understanding, prudence, and foresight; he has to take into consideration the symptoms of the disease, the age, constitution, strength, and other circumstances of the sick person; so that he may know what sort of medicine he has to administer in different cases, whether it should be strong or weak, sweet or bitter, cooling or heating, how often and in what quantity it has to be given.

What the medicine prescribed by the doctor is to the diseases of the body that is the fraternal correction given by a well-meaning Christian to the spiritual maladies of his neighbor. The one

intends to save the body ; the other, the soul from death, and to keep it alive. Therefore, the latter, as well as the former, if he hopes to do any good, must use great prudence and caution, and take every circumstance into consideration, lest, by administering the correction in an unskilful manner, he do more harm to his neighbor than good. These circumstances are generally comprised in the words so well known to theologians : *who, what, where, by what means, why, how, when.* Remember that I am not speaking of those who are bound in *justice* to correct others, but only of those whom *charity* obliges to perform that duty.

1. I must see *who the person is* whom I think to be in need of correction from me ; whether he is a stranger or an acquaintance of mine. Private individuals are rarely obliged to administer correction to a stranger whom they are not acquainted with, although they may be well aware that he is not leading a Christian life, unless, indeed, the case is one in which I can be of assistance to others in inducing him to amend, or if he indulges in sinful actions or words in my presence, so that the opportunity is offered me of giving him a friendly warning, or of showing my displeasure at his conduct. If the person is well known to me, and is a neighbor or friend of mine, then I must consider whether he is of a higher or lower position than I, or whether he is equal to me in worldly standing. In the first case, as for instance, if a son has to admonish his father, or a daughter her mother, or a subject his superior, or a young man one who is advanced in life, a poor man one who is wealthy, an ignorant man one who is learned and well educated ; then common sense tells us that we must be very courteous, careful, and modest in what we say ; we must give the admonition with all respect, humility and reverence, if we hope to produce any good effect by it. Such is the advice given us by St. Paul : "An ancient man rebuke not, but entreat him as a father" (1. Tim. 5 : 1). You must not reprove him in harsh terms, but rather implore of him, as your father, to take in good part what you have to say. Other acquaintances of ours, who are

of lower or equal position, we can, after due examination of the matter, take to task with greater freedom and severity, reminding them of their duty, but always in such a way as to observe all the circumstances of fraternal correction given in a proper manner.

2. The next circumstance is, *what* have we to warn him of; in what am I bound to admonish my neighbor? St. Augustine tells us this: "You must not seek for something reprehensible; but rather reprove what you have seen; otherwise, we should seem to be spies on the actions of others." To go about here and there prying into the affairs of our neighbors through curiosity, to watch or ask how this or that one lives, what he does, what happens in this or that company, and that with the sole object of finding something to criticise and condemn, that is not at all required. Such is, indeed, the duty of superiors, parents, and masters with regard to their subjects; but in a private individual it would be mere curiosity, and the mark of an idle man, who is more inclined to meddle with his neighbor than to attend to his own business; it would be acting like the envious Pharisees of whom the Gospel says: "They watched him" (Luke 14: 1), meaning our Lord. No; what you see yourself, that you must correct.

3. The third circumstance is, *where, in what place,* the correction should be given. This question is answered by our divine Master, Christ Himself: "If thy brother shall offend against thee, go and rebuke him between thee and him alone." Fraternal correction, if it is to be profitable, must be administered in secret, and not in the presence of others, for we must not put our erring brother to useless shame, or unjustly lessen his good reputation; since that would rather excite his anger than induce him to amend his evil ways. Unless, indeed, he gives public scandal by improper, impure, or blasphemous discourse, or by indecent actions; then charity and zeal for the divine honor require us to show our displeasure at such language or actions, either by some outward sign, if the person is of a higher position than we are, or by inter-

rupting the conversation. Christ our Saviour had taught us this, not only by word, but also by example. Peter had sinned, and that, too, grievously, when he denied his Master three times in the court of the high-priest. Our Lord heard all he said ; did he reprove him ? Certainly he did. But how ? Was it by harsh and severe words? No; for that was not the place for such a reproof ; the court was full of servants, and our Lord did not wish to put Peter to shame before them. How did he, then, act? He looked at Peter, but with such compassion and deep meaning that his look pierced the heart of the apostle more profoundly than any words, and brought him to see and repent of his sin with bitter tears. But on another occasion, when Peter wished to deter his Master from undergoing the torments of his Passion and death, and when they were only accompanied by a few well-known disciples, who probably heard nothing of what was going on, our Lord reproved him sharply : "Go behind me, satan," he exclaimed, "thou art a scandal unto me ; because thou savorest not the things that are of God" (Matt. 16 : 23). Even with the hard-hearted and obdurate Judas he employed a wonderful mildness in this respect, for at the Last Supper he did not reprove his treachery openly, lest he should put him to shame before the other disciples ; but spoke of it in such a way that Judas alone could understand what he alluded to, while the others could not know anything about it.

Many are the faults committed in this respect by husbands and wives, who, when they have to administer what they think to be a wholesome reproof, wait till the whole family is assembled at table, and then commence upbraiding in sharp and cutting words before servants and children ; so that the only likely result of their reproof is mutual recrimination, or cursing and swearing, or even blows. That is not the place for a wholesome Christian admonition. Young wives are sometimes more guilty in this way, when they go after their husbands to the saloons, and reprove their drunkenness before the assembled guests. There can be no possibility of doing good in such a place as that by admonition. Others, again, have not courage enough to administer the reproof

to the erring one alone, but wait till there are three or four friends together, when they seem to have more courage, and speak hardily of faults they wish to correct. But the place is ill chosen, and, instead of doing good, the correction is far more likely to do harm, by putting the person to shame. "Rebuke him between thee and him alone."

4. With what means should the correction be given? With regard to this circumstance I must consider whether, for instance, I have reasonable grounds for hoping that my admonition will do good if administered privately; otherwise, according to the nature of the case, I should ask others to help me. Who should they be, and how must I manage the matter? Can I make known my neighbor's fault to the first I meet? Not by any means! That would be detraction, a fault, that I should be guilty of by complaining, under pretext of being displeased at their sins, of the failings of others to their friends and acquaintances. How can I do it, then! If I have to ask others to help me, I must tell them what I want them for. Certainly, but you must tell only those who are in a position to help you We read in the Book of Genesis that Joseph accused his brother of a grievous crime; but to whom? It is not written that he accused them to his neighbors, but to his father (Gen. 37 : 2), who was able to prevent a repetition of the crime. Now, we know whom we have to appeal to in such a case. If a child commits a fault, I should tell its parents. If servants keep dangerous company, I should tell their employers. The faults of parishoners I should make known to the parish-priest; of penitents to their confessor, or to other superiors, if the case requires it, and there is no other means available. This is the meaning of the words of our Lord: "If he will not hear them, tell the Church." If your brother will not listen to you or to others, and refuses to amend after you have privately admonished him, tell the Church; and if that does not help, commend the matter to God and say no more about it.

5. Why; what should be the motive and intention in adminis-

tering fraternal correction? The only motive should be the *pure love of God and of our neighbor*, and our intention should be to prevent sin. If I have any other motive, the correction is not Christian nor honestly meant, but, a lying rebuke, a hypocritical and false admonition. Ah, how lamentably most people fall in this respect! They appear to have some zeal for the divine honor and their neighbor's salvation, and sometimes persuade themselves that they have it; but when the day comes on which God will examine justice itself with a lantern, then it shall be made evident that it is not always a zeal for God and for souls, but rather self-love and hatred that is the motive of the reproof; nay, it may even be a sort of jealousy excited with regard to the very vices that are reproved, "There is a lying rebuke in the anger of an injurious man; and there is a judgment that is not allowed to be good" (Ecclus. 19 : 28).

6. When should the correction be given? As soon as ever we hope to do some good thereby; nor should we wait till the vice has become so inveterate that there is little hope of inducing our neighbor to amend. When the unhappy prince Amnon was murdered in broad daylight by the servants of his brother Absalom, Jonadab, one of David's courtiers, knew of the matter long beforehand. But it was not till the foul deed was accomplished and the whole court thrown into the utmost confusion thereby, as if a similar fate was in store for all the princes, that Jonadab stood up and declared that Amnon was the only victim, and that Absalom had been already plotting his destruction for two years. If he had disclosed the plot to the king in time, what great evils would he not have prevented! As it was, Amnon lost his life; Absalom had to fly into exile, and David was forced to shed many a bitter tear. Such is the fault of many who for a long time observe the bad conduct of their neighbors' children, but do not venture to speak to the parents until there is hardly any hope of inducing the children to amend. More especially do parents err in this respect when they spare the rod while their children are young, thinking

some allowance must be made for their youth, and that afterwards there will be time enough to bring them back on the right path. But there is little chance of correcting them then ; you might as well try to tame a wolf when it is grown old. Punishment, when it is required, should be administered while the children are young ; afterwards it will be too late, and the parents will, like David, find in their children a source of bitter sorrow and trouble, nay, of shame and disgrace. Therefore, fraternal correction should be given when there is still reason for hoping that it will do some good. Again, just as every place will not do for this correction, so also should the proper time be chosen, no matter how pure the intention may otherwise be. "All things have their season" (Eccles. 3 : 1), and it is especially necessary that I should wait till my neighbor is in the proper mood to listen to me, before I proceed to correct him. It is a general rule with doctors never to give medicine to a sick man while he is in the height and delirium of a fever ; otherwise he would only be made worse, and would be placed in imminent danger of death ; therefore they wait until the fever has somewhat subsided. "Stir not the fire with a sword, else you will cause the flames to burst forth with still greater violence." In the same way when a man is in the heat of a violent passion, it is not the right time to administer fraternal correction ; in such circumstances a word of rebuke would be like stirring the fire with a sword, it would only inflame his passion still more. Jonathan gives us a beautiful example of how we should act in similar circumstances. He was obliged to witness daily the blind fury with which his father persecuted David, hunting him from place to place and seeking his life. He was very willing to protect his innocent friend ; but as his father was always in a violent rage, he restrained himself until he found the latter in a good humor at table. Then he profited by the opportunity, and represented to Saul the innocence and fidelity of David, and the injustice of persecuting such a man; and on one occasion his remonstrance made such an impression that Saul swore that he would never again do the least thing to

harm David, but rather make him his friend. So much depends on selecting the proper time for administering fraternal correction. Great is the mistake, therefore, of those women who, when their husbands come home drunk at night, abuse them and the vice of drunkenness in all the moods and tenses. Oh, my good women, that is not the time for you to correct your husbands! The only result you could hope for under such circumstances is a severe beating. You should keep quite still, or if you say anything, let your words be only those of praise and encouragement, and wait with your correction until the drunken fit is over; then you will have reason for hoping that a few modest words of reproof will not fail to do good.

7. In what manner should the correction be given? If the love of our neighbor and the desire of his good should be the only motives for correcting him, if the most suitable time and place should be selected for administering the correction, it follows that it should be given in the manner most likely to move our neighbor's heart and mind to amend his ways. Amongst private individuals (it is otherwise with regard to parents and other superiors) the best means of doing that is to observe the utmost friendliness and mildness of manner and language, so that the person corrected may see that we act out of pure desire for his spiritual welfare. A harsh, domineering manner, or a sarcastic reproof, or words that would cause him to feel shame, would make matters worse, and fill the person with a desire of revenge for the insult we offer him. No, that is not the way in which the almighty God has told us to correct our neighbor. "The just man shall correct me in mercy" (Ps. 140 : 5), says David. "The servant of the Lord must not wrangle, but be mild towards all men, apt to teach, patient, with modesty admonishing them that resist the truth"(2. Tim. 2 : 24, 25). "Brethren, and if a man be overtaken in any fault, instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted" (Galat. 6 : 1). Each one should remember that he too, is a sinful mortal, subject to many faults and imperfections;

and therefore, when he has to correct his brother, he should do so in the spirit of Jesus Christ, who never harshly reproved any sinner but always encouraged them by gentle words to amend; such as, "Be not unfaithful; go and sin no more." Such were the words he used to Thomas, to the paralytic man, to the adulteress, to Magdalene, and to other public sinners. Even before the written law, when Lot wished to deter his fellow-citizens from the commission of an abominable crime, he did not address them in violent terms, or curse them, or swear at them ; but with the greatest mildness begged of them not to be guilty of such a sin : "Do not so, I beseech you, my brethren, do not commit this evil."

So, too, should we correct each other. And that our neighbor may have still less reason to feel ashamed, it would often be advisable for us not to speak too bluntly of his fault, but rather to hint at it in a general way, and at the same time to excuse his intention. For instance; this is a matter in which you are wont to act so and so, and you seem to attach no importance to it ; I can, of course, easily believe that you have no bad intention therein ; but I wish you would ask your confessor about it and see what he has to say ; at all events, I should feel myself troubled in conscience if I were to act as you do. Often we might speak of the matter as if it concerned others in general : Alas, how common such and such a vice is in the world! People act as if they were allowed to do as they please; what a pity that men should be so blind, and expose their souls to the risk of eternal damnation ! Such was the manner in which Nathan reproved David for the crimes of murder and adultery; he began with a parable and laid the blame on an imaginary person. There was a rich man, he said, who took away a poor man's sheep and ate it ; and when David grew angry, and said that the man should die, Nathan spoke more clearly, and said to him: "Thou art the man."

Ah, my dear brethren, if we only had a zealous love of God and of our neighbor, that alone, since love is acute, would teach us how to act so as to help each other to repent and to amend.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

READINESS TO ACCEPT FRATERNAL CORRECTION.

"Render therefore to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's." Matt. 22 : 21.

How gently, and at the same time how prudently, our Lord dealt with those Pharisees! They wished to ensare him in his speech. For if he had answered their question, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not," by saying no, it is not lawful, they would have had cause enough to accuse him before the judges and have him condemned to death. But if, on the other hand, he had said that they were bound to pay the tribute, then they could have accused him of being an enemy of the Jewish people. But our Lord evaded all their snares by the simple answer: "Render therefore to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's." By those words, too, he gave them a well-meant and fatherly instruction as to what they owed their Lord and God, and what they owed their lawful superiors. Would to God that they had only taken that lesson to heart and profited by it; had they done so, their lot would not have been such a wretched one. We have already heard that fraternal correction is necessary, and also how it should be given in order to do good to our neighbor. I now go on to speak of the person who has to be corrected, and to show in what manner he should take the correction.

He who is corrected, should accept brotherly admonition with gratitude.

Reason itself tells every one of us that we should be grateful to a well-meaning friend for the benefit he bestows on us. If there were no looking-glass in the whole world, the human eye would be

unfortunate, for although it could contemplate all the riches and beauty of the earth, it could not see itself, nor know what it looks like, or whether it was beautiful or ugly, white or black, blue or grey. That service is rendered us by the looking-glass, which is always ready to show us our own countenances, and to let us see whether we are handsome or ugly; and if it had reason and free will, so that it could grant its services or refuse them, we should be thankful to it for showing us any spots that might be on our faces, since once we have seen them we can wipe them off. If there were no doctor in the world, sick people would be badly off, and would not know what to do; therefore the patient, like the wounded man in the Gospel who was cared for by the Samaritan, owes gratitude to the doctor, who after having felt his pulse and considered the symptoms of his disease, prescribes the medicines that are required to restore him to health. The traveler who has lost his way is bound to be most grateful to him who puts him on the right road again. But what does it all mean? That the showing the spots on the face, the curing the disease, the putting the traveler on the right road, are all benefits without which the first would be dirty, the second sick, the third still wandering off the road.

From these similes you may see what a great benefit is fraternal correction and admonition. It is a fatal consequence of original sin that our nature is so blinded that we not only seek with all possible diligence to hide our faults from the eyes of others, but, as far as we can, even from ourselves. Self-love makes us most unwilling to acknowledge our own short-comings; we carry, so to speak, our own faults on our backs, where we cannot see them; nay, we often imagine that what is really scandalous is becoming in us, and we count as virtues those sins and vices that are condemned by God.

Now in those circumstances a good Christian, who is really zealous for the honor of God and the good of souls, comes to you and exhorts you, or administers fraternal correction, by which he enables you to see the deformity and malice of this or that vice; and that he does with the best intentions in your regard, out of

pity for your soul, and a sincere desire for your welfare ; he does it also with all possible meekness and modesty. That man is the looking-glass that shows you the spots and stains. What spots and stains? Not those which merely disfigure your face in the eyes of men, and which are not worth thinking of ; but the abominations that defile your soul, and make it an object of disgust in the sight of God, beautiful as it is by nature. He is the physician who shows you your disease and the means of curing it. What disease ? Not one that threatens the life of the body ; but one that imperils the life of your immortal soul. He is the merciful and generous friend, who gives you a rich alms, although you have not asked him. What sort of an alms is it ? Not a piece of bread which is able to still the pangs of hunger for a day ; but the bread of life which can rescue the soul from extreme danger forever. He is the faithful guide, who shows you where you are going astray, and leads you back to the right path. How were you going astray ? It is not merely a matter of lengthening your journey from one place to another by a few hours, and of being no worse off for having lost your way ; but of bringing you back from the road that was taking you every moment farther and farther away from heaven, and would at last have brought you to the depths of hell.

Now if the service rendered by the looking-glass, the doctor, the generous friend, the faithful guide, deserves gratitude from every honest mind, because it is a benefit, although a small one, with what thankfulness should you not take the well-meant exhortation and admonition of your neighbor, which you have every reason to consider as a far greater benefit ? Ah, you prize as friends those flatterers and time-servers who know how to win your favor by saying what will please you and approving of everything you do ; who never tell you the truth, but always seek to tickle your ears with flattery ; who, when you are most defiled with sin, are capable of saying to you : Oh, how beautiful you are ! who, when death is already in your face, can exclaim : I have never seen you looking so well ! who, when you have lost you way in a

gloomy forest, cry out to you : go on, you are on the right road ! These are the people whom you consider your best friends ; these you lend a willing ear to ; in them you trust, although their false praise and flattery are only leading you on to destruction. Believe me, and be assured that you have no better friend in the world than he who is charitable enough to tell you the truth when you have done wrong, and to admonish and exhort you in a brotherly manner. And therefore it is but right that you should take what he says as a great benefit which deserves your gratitude, and humbly acknowledge your fault and firmly resolve to amend it.

How small the number of those who take fraternal correction with humility and thankfulness, and look on it as a real benefit ! Instead of thanking the glass that shows them their deformity, they act like the notorious Thais. Happening once in her old age to look in the glass, and seeing the many wrinkles on her forehead and her sunken cheeks,she got into such a rage that she flung it out of the window and swore that she would never look at one again. Why so ? In her youth she spent much time before the glass ; why did she get in such a rage against it ? Because she could not bear the sight of her wrinkled and now ugly face, and therefore the glass which showed her her deformity became hateful in her eyes. Instead of being grateful to the well-meaning doctor who prescribes for their diseases, they act like those sick people who, when they are forbidden certain kinds of food and drink, turn away from the doctor with aversion and will have no more of him. Instead of being grateful to the good friend who is willing to aid their poor souls with spiritual alms, they act like those who, although they are poor in reality, try through pride to pass for rich people. If you give them an alms, what ? they exclaim ; what do you take me for ? Do you think I am a beggar ? Keep your alms for yourself ; I am not in want of it. Instead of being grateful to the guide who has shown them where they have gone astray, they act like a foolish traveler, who, being told by a peasant whom he meets that he has lost his way, begins to abuse and curse. What brings that fellow here ? he says. Can he not

mind his own affairs? He has quite upset me with his uncalled-for remarks. I will go on my way and not take any notice of him.

They do not wish their faults to be seen or known; they do not desire to know anything of the diseases they are suffering from; their pride is hurt at the idea of their being looked on as poor; they refuse to acknowledge that they have strayed from the right path, or else they do not wish to amend their evil ways. Thus the looking-glass, the doctor, the friend, the guide, who comes to them with fraternal correction, is an object of hatred in their eyes. They abuse and turn him away. Mind your own business, they say to him; I do not want your warnings; wait till I send for you before you preach to me. Thus it is that truth causes hatred, according to the old saying, and as St. John the Baptist experienced, when he admonished the unchaste Herod. "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 6:18), said he. But the saint had to suffer for telling the truth. Away with him at once, exclaimed Herod; out of my sight with that troublesome preacher.

But woe to those who refuse to profit by admonition! Hear what the Holy Ghost says: He that hateth to be reproved walketh in the trace of the devil; he is a follower and imitator of the devil. Why? Because the devil is so proud that he does not like to hear his faults spoken of, and at the same time he is so hardened and obstinate in guilt that, even if he could, he would not lay aside his wickedness or free himself from it. How can we distinguish a wise man from a fool? By the way in which he takes correction, as the Holy Ghost again says: "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Teach a just man and he shall make haste to receive it" (Prov. 9 : 8, 9). On the other hand, "he that hateth reproof is foolish" (Prov. 12 : 1), and he shows clearly enough that he hates his own soul. The punishment of this folly even in this life will be that he who refuses to listen to reproof will be blinded by flatterers and wicked men, and by divine permission become more hardened in his evil ways.

Meanwhile, pious Christians, this should not interfere with your zeal for the divine honor. It is true that a private individual is never bound under pain of sin to administer fraternal correction when he has reason for believing that he can do no good to his neighbor thereby. There is no such obligation for private individuals; yet one should not be too desponding in this matter, nor too easily give way to doubts with regard to the good effects of his reproof. If now and then you do no good, yet your words have not been uttered altogether in vain; you have done your duty, and your reward will be just as great in heaven as if you had succeeded. Christ has not told you to gain your brother ; but to rebuke him ; he does not say; go and gain him; but "to rebuke him; if he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother." If he obstinately refuses to hear you, you cannot help that and are not responsible for it. Even if, contrary to your expectations, your neighbor were only to become worse in consequence of your reproof, you did not foresee that; you meant well towards him, and whatever harm has been done him, he may thank himself for it. When vices are reproved, and scandal is caused thereby, it is to be imputed to him who has committed the reprehensible act, and not to him who has reproved it. And generally speaking, even when the person who is admonished blushes with shame, or becomes angry, it does not follow that the rebuke is totally lost on him; for afterwards when he thinks calmly of the matter, he must come to the conclusion that the correction was well meant, that it was founded on fact. Thus if he does not amend at once, he will do so gradually, although shame does not allow him to acknowledge that at first.

May that zeal and love of justice, that hatred of iniquity flourish in us, and may none of us ever flatter vice, but when and wherever it is possible let us never be wanting in doing our part to help our neighbor to amend his life. Let us admonish each other in the spirit of charity; especially should parents with regard to their children, and superiors with regard to their subjects, be most particular in the performance of this duty. Let

those who are admonished take the correction with gratitude, and thus let us mutually help each other to put an end to sin, and to extend the kingdom of God daily, until by means of this mutual help we shall eternally rejoice with God in heaven, in the most perfect love and union. Amen.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE GRATITUDE OF THE SOULS IN PURGATORY TOWARDS THEIR BENEFACTORS.

"*My daughter is even now dead.*" *Matt.* 9 : 18.

It is appointed for all men once to die ; the one goes first, and the other follows, into a long eternity. My daughter died yesterday ; my son is buried to-day ; my father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, friend, is dead ! And what then ? Weeping, moaning, and lamentation are to be heard in the house of death on the part of children, parents, and other friends and relatives ; that lasts for one, two, or three weeks, and then the departed is forgotten as if he had never lived. If he is sometimes remembered with a secret sigh, it is generally a useless sigh, a vain remembrance. Few there are who trouble themselves as to the lot of souls in the next world ; and yet that should be the first thing to occupy our thoughts, that we may help them, if they are in Purgatory, with prayers, Masses, almsgiving, and other good works. To help the poor souls is a most excellent act of charity not only towards the departed, but also towards God himself. Moreover that help is a work of charity even towards ourselves, because we can expect a hundredfold reward from the Poor Souls for the service we render them.

I. We should be generous to the Poor Souls in Purgatory, on account of the great need in which they are;

II. On account of the advantage we ourselves shall derive therefrom.

If I see another in extreme necessity, and can help him without any loss to myself and without much trouble, I am certainly bound to do so. This is the command of God, the law of charity, and even of the light of reason itself. So that he who omits a charitable work of that kind is looked on by all as guilty of the greatest cruelty. Who does not wonder at the cruelty of the Samaritan woman, who so long denied a drink of water to our Lord when he was thirsty and asked of her a drink, although she had a full pitcher of water by her and the whole well to draw from? Who is not indignant at the boorishness of Nabal, who so churlishly refused the humble request of David for a little food for himself and his followers? Who does not condemn the hard-heartedness of the rich glutton who allowed the poor Lazarus to sit at his door amongst the dogs and refused him even the crumbs that fell from his table?

If Purgatory were nothing but a prison in which the Poor Souls are confined, and kept away from the sight of their Creator, could any bodily suffering be compared with theirs, when we consider the qualities of those souls and all their circumstances? There is an old saying that no prison can be beautiful, even if it is your own room, or the hall of an imperial palace inlaid with gold; the mere fact of your being a prisoner takes away all the beauty of it. Chain up a dog that is accustomed to run loose, and see what he will do; how he howls and barks and runs to the length of his chain, and gnaws at the wood to which it is fastened, in the hope of getting free! Put a bird in a cage, and see how it flutters about, trying one wire after another with its beak, to see if there is any hole big enough to let it escape! Shut up a cat in a room, and it will clamber up the walls and run its head out of the window until it gets free. Wolves and other wild beasts have been

known to gnaw off their foot when it was caught in a trap, in order to escape. If imprisonment is then such an intolerable thing for unreasoning animals, that are after all slaves by nature, and given over to us to use them as we please, what a torment must it not be for a rational being who is by nature free?

To be able to form some idea of that torment, imagine the great desire, and, at the same time, the inexpressible grief of a father, who, returning after a long voyage, full of the hope of seeing again his dear wife and children and friends, from whom he has been absent for years, finds that on his arrival in harbor he is kept in quarantine for six months, because he has come from a country that is infected with a plague ; and there he has to remain shut up all that time, without being allowed to see any one from outside. What do you think would be the poor man's feelings under those circumstances? To be in his own country, in his own town, so near his loved ones, and yet unable to see them ; how long must not the hours of his imprisonment seem to him? How he counts the months, the weeks, the days that have to elapse before he is set at liberty !

Again, imagine one who has been chosen as the bride of a great king, and who is on her way to join her beloved spouse, but is taken prisoner by her enemies and kept in close confinement. What desires and wishes she must form for freedom ; what longings that do violence to the human mind and cause the utmost torment she must constantly feel! Yet almost infinitely greater is the torment of a soul in Purgatory, that sighs with the most ardent longings for the sight of its God, and yet has to sigh in vain. Sceptres, crowns, and all that is glorious or great on earth ; created beauty and every thing in the world that can attract our love; ah, what are ye all in comparison with the supreme and most beautiful of all goods, God himself? Painful desires and longings of one creature for another, ah, what are ye in comparison with the yearnings of a soul that is already close to God by its full knowledge, and yet is kept in prison, unable to see its beloved God, its promised bridegroom? It seems to me that I hear such a soul

crying out from Purgatory in the words of the Psalmist : "My tears have been my bread day and night : whilst it is said to me daily : where is thy God ?" (Ps. 41 : 4.) This sad thought is always before my mind : where is thy God ? thy last end ? the centre and fulfilment of all thy happiness ? Where is he ? Did not all my efforts on earth tend solely to possessing him for all eternity ? "When shall I come and appear before the face of God ?" (Ps. 41 : 3.) When will that longed-for moment arrive when I shall be freed from this prison ? How many years have I spent here already ? How many days, months, years will have to elapse during which I shall still be deprived of the possession of my God ? "Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged !" (Ps. 119 : 5.) Fearful is the duration of my imprisonment ! Is there no one to stretch out a helping hand to me ? No one to open a door of escape for me ?

We pity poor prisoners on earth, although they are generally criminals, murderers, and thieves. Our hearts, if they are not of stone or iron, would melt to see them confined in gloomy dungeons, behind iron bars, pallid, half-naked, lying on straw, covered with filth and vermin ; and to console them a little in their sad state, we send them food and clothing. Should not the same pity influence us with regard to the Poor Souls, who are servants and dear friends of God, and are confined in a far more painful prison ? The former are indeed deserving of compassion, although their only punishment, so far, is that they have to remain in prison until their sentence is pronounced ; but the latter are kept away from the God whom they so long and desire to possess, and have to suffer in the fire of Purgatory.

Ah, that one word, fire, is sufficient to give us an idea of their torments. If no soul were confined in it longer than one day or a few hours, it would still be a place of terrible torments. What can be more terrible, more horrifying, than the idea of burning for such a long time ? Go and look at a furnace in which iron is melted ; imagine that you are about to be cast into it alive ; your flesh creeps at the bare thought! Think of the gridiron, on which

St. Lawrence was roasted over a slow fire for some hours ; could you bear that torment for even half an hour? Your blood runs cold at the mere thought of it ! Oh, no, you could not bear it ! And meanwhile, what have you been considering? That which is nothing more than a painted fire, compared to that in which the Poor Souls are burning. What ? A painted fire ? Yes, and do you wish to know why ?

In the first place, the more fire is confined, the less air it has, the greater also is its force and violence ; it works far more powerfully in a confined space than in the open air. When a handful of powder is ignited in a mortar, the small flame that comes from it drives the heavy iron shell high into the air as if it were a child's ball, and shatters with it everything it comes across, as with a thunder-bolt. The strongest walls, towers, mountains, and rocks are blown up by subterranean mines. Imagine now the force of that fire which is confined in the middle of the earth, where not the least breath of air can reach it, and how it rages and roars against the Poor Souls ! In the second place, an instrument does more or less work according as the hand that wields it is stronger or weaker. Give a child a rod and let him beat you with it; you can bear twenty blows from him without feeling pain; but if a strong man beats you with the same rod, he will cause the blood to spurt out from your hand in a few moments. What is the fire that men can enkindle for their uses on earth ? It is a rod or a sword, but it is, so to speak, placed in the hand of a weak child; that is, it is an element which cannot produce any effect beyond its own natural powers. But the fire of Purgatory is an instrument raised above its nature by the mighty arm of God's justice, which, as it is all-powerful, gives it, as it were, an infinite increase of intensity. Therefore, according to the opinions of the holy Fathers, it comprises all imaginable torments that men can suffer. "This fire," says St. Augustine, "although it is not eternal, exceeds all the pains that any one ever suffered on this earth." "The least pain of Purgatory," says St. Thomas of Aquin, "exceeds the greatest of this life." "Nay,"

exclaims St. Gregory, "take away the blasphemies, the despair, and the eternity from hell, and you will not be able to distinguish between the condition of a lost soul in hell and a soul in purgatory ; because the fire in which the elect are purified is one and the same with that in which the damned are tormented." The Church, too, prays for the departed in the following terms : "Deliver the souls of the faithful departed from the pains of hell."

In this terrible fiery prison the Poor Souls are confined for weeks, months, years, for twenty, fifty, a hundred years, or even longer, and since they cannot help themselves, they keep crying out to us : Have pity on me ! have pity on me ! Give me even one Communion, one Mass, one rosary, one act of mortification, even one good work of the many you perform every day ! What you thus bestow on me will be of the greatest help in lessening my torments and shortening the time of my imprisonment. Ah, have pity on me ! "But," continues St. Augustine, "there are few who make any response to the appeal!" O my brethren, how cruel that is ! The sick man calls from his bed, and there is some one to bring him medicines and to comfort him ; a dog howls at the door and there is some one to open it for him ; an animal falls into a pit and it is helped out, "but the faithful soul cries out in its torments, and no one heeds it." What cruelty on the part of reasoning beings ! Do you not hear them crying out : Father, mother, have pity on me ! Son, daughter, have pity on me ! Husband, wife, have pity on me ! Brothers, sisters, friends, relatives, have pity on me ! Should not the sight of such sorrow and suffering move us to shed tears of compassion ? Yet such are in reality the cries sent forth by those Poor Souls, although we cannot hear them with our bodily ears. How cruel it is to pay no attention to them, to make no effort to help them, especially since we can do so easily by applying to their advantage a share of our daily actions, to their great relief and without the least loss or additional trouble to ourselves ! But why do I say without loss ? It is rather of the greatest advantage to us to help the Poor Souls, and

therefore we are still less to be excused if we refuse to show them mercy.

II. Although the blind heathens thought that the souls of men die with their bodies as if they were dumb beasts, so that they could not hope for any return or advantage from them ; yet they were wont to show the greatest honor to the memory of the departed. Millions of money were spent in building splendid monuments and mousoleums to keep fresh the memory of the dead. What would they have done if they had believed that their souls were immortal and destined to live in a far happier country, where they could make a rich return for all the honor and generosity shown them, as our faith teaches us? Oh, what a great interest is brought in to us by the small capital we expend for them ! What graces and favors we owe to the few works of devotion that we perform during our lives for the relief of the Poor Souls ! As time does not permit it, I will say nothing now of the benefit we have to expect from the souls themselves whom we help; for it is certain that since they are friends of God and in full conformity with his will, although they are in torments and cannot help themselves, yet they can pray to God for others. If these souls are so powerful while still in prison, how much more will they not be able to do for us when by our good works they shall be freed from their sufferings and be enabled to enter heaven?

Will the God of infinite fidelity and generosity allow our charity and mercy to go unrewarded? Was it then merely to deceive us that he said : "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy"? (Matt. 5: 7.) Is there no meaning in that magnificent promise of his : "Give, and it shall be given to you : good measure and pressed down and shaken together and running over shall they give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6: 38), especially as our Lord says that what we do to the least of his brethren he will take as having been done to himself? What help and grace may we not expect from that mercy in the hour when

we are most in need, the hour of death ? Are we not expressly assured of this : "Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor : the Lord will deliver him in the evil day"? (Ps. 40: 2) that is, in the dangerous hour of death the Lord will take care of him and free him from the hands of his enemies. Then he will be helped by those souls, far more faithful to him than his friends and relatives, and his deathbed will be surrounded by those whom he either freed from Purgatory or relieved therein, and who will now bring him heavenly help and consolation in return.

"Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity; that when you shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings" (Luke 16 : 9). There have been some who, when at the point of death, saw souls standing round them like an army defending them from the attacks of the devil and ready to accompany them into heaven. What help and grace may not be expected as the reward of this mercy after death, if one has to spend some time in Purgatory to pay off his own debts ! Oh, if I had the happiness to free even one soul from that prison, and that I had to go there myself after death, would that now happy soul look on with indifference, while I, its benefactor and the promoter of its happiness, languish in torments with the severity of which it is well acquainted ? Would it not intercede with God for my speedy liberation ? And with what confidence could I not look to that soul and say as Joseph did when the butler was released from the Egyptian prison: "Only remember me when it shall be well with thee, and do me this kindness : to put Pharao in mind to take me out of this prison" (Gen. 40: 14). Remember me, I might say ; think of me, blessed soul ! A year or two ago I brought you liberty ; do not forget me who have to suffer as you had then ! Remember me now when it is well with you ; intercede for me with God, with whom you can do all things, and beg of him to free me from this prison. Remember how it was with you when you were there ; how you longed for the moment of your liberation to come : it was I who helped you thereto ; show now the same mercy to me, so that by

your assistance I may soon come to heaven and rejoice with you. The butler forgot Joseph for a long time, but we may be certain that such a soul, which clearly sees in the beatific vision all the prayers that are addressed to it, will not long remain insensible to them.

And again, I often ask myself if it is possible for one to be lost forever who tries to bring others to heaven? Is it possible for a Christian to be damned who makes every effort to free souls from Purgatory? No; God is too good and faithful not to show mercy to him who has been merciful. Otherwise why should he at once invite into his kingdom those who fed him, gave him to drink, freed him from prison, visited and consoled him in sickness, if he should condemn to hell the Christian who renders him all those services in the persons of the Poor Souls? No, I say again; the poor souls themselves would not allow that. If their benefactor was at the last gasp in the state of sin, and in danger of being sent to hell for all eternity, they would unanimously cry out to God for a powerful grace of repentance for him, saying like the Jewish people when Jonathan's life was in danger after he had routed the Philistines, on account of his having eaten a little honey against his father's command: "Shall Jonathan then die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel?" (1. Kings 14 : 45.) Shall he perish who saved us from the hands of our enemies? No, we cannot allow that; not a hair of his head shall fall to the ground. What? those souls would cry out; shall he, O good God, be condemned to hell forever who has shown us such great charity? It is to him we owe it that we are freed so soon from our torments and have come to enjoy eternal rest with thee; and must he now be among the reprobate? Ah, be merciful to him according to thy promise, for he has been merciful to us.

Let us make trial of this, my dear brethren, and by frequent works of mercy make friends of the departed; and we shall find that we have not lost, but gained, by our trouble. There have been many, I know there are some still, who keep nothing for themselves, but give all their satisfactory works to the Poor Souls,

and in my opinion they themselves are the gainers thereby. If we do not wish to be so generous, then let us at least give a part of our satisfactory works to the Poor Souls every day ; this is an alms that the most needy beggar can bestow as well as the richest lord.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

"*But pray that your flight be not in the winter.*" *Matt.* 24 : 20.

In those troublous times that are to precede the end of the world, during the reign of Antichrist, when everything is to be destroyed on the approach of the Day of Judgment, and men will be filled with anguish, will they then be able to do something for themselves by prayer, since Christ says that we must then pray ? Truly, my dear brethren, prayer is always efficacious ; we have that assurance from God himself : Ask, and you shall receive. No exception is made of time, place, or circumstances ! "Amen, amen I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you" (John 16 : 23). No matter what it is, only pray. Do you want consolation in your troubles ? Pray, and you will find it. Do you want help in persecutions ? Pray, and you will surely have it. Our prayers are always heard ; the prayer of the just man is never fruitless, or in other words

We always receive when we pray to God ; therefore we should pray often, nay, always.

How many a sick man sighs forth his prayers for recovery, and

still remains as ill as he was before? How many a poor man would have been rich long ago if his prayers for riches had been heard. How many a sad and sorrowful heart begs to be freed from the heavy burden of tribulation? O how often, how earnestly I have prayed and got others to pray for the health of my dear child, my husband or wife! But what was the good of it all? Death was unmoved by my prayers; the objects of my dearest love are now in the grave. How often have I not prayed, and I still pray, that my wicked husband or undutiful son may be converted, but all to no purpose; there is not the least sign of amendment. And now you try to persuade us that we always receive whenever we pray to God? No, I do not believe it; and will not, even if you preach a hundred sermons about it; daily experience shows me that what you say is false.

But listen to me for a moment before you decide. Suppose that you are a poor beggar, and I a rich man, you come to me and ask me for a trifle for God's sake. I put my hand in my pocket and give you a gold-piece. What would you say to that? Oh, truly, your gratitude would be boundless, and you would ask of God to reward me a thousand times. But why? Have you got what you asked from me? Yes, you say, and I am well content with it? But that is not the case; you asked for a trifle, and you did not get the trifle. Yes, you reply, but I got something very much better, for there are many small coins in what you gave me. If I got that much at every door I knock at, I should soon be a rich man. So that in that case you have no difficulty in seeing that your prayer is granted. Now that is the way in which the rich Lord of heaven distributes alms to all who knock at his door. Never does he refuse any one who asks him, especially when one is in the state of grace; we always receive from him something a thousand times better than what we ask for.

Let no one complain that he has prayed in vain, that his prayers are not heard, that he has received nothing; but rather let every one acknowledge with thankful heart that God has bestowed on him far more than he would have dared to expect or hope for.

True, you have not received the bodily health for which you have often prayed, or the temporal prosperity, or the recovery of your child, your husband, your wife. These were the miserable farthings for which you begged, and which God knew well would not be good for your soul. But instead of them you have got something that is worth infinitely more than all those things put together. Nay, if we consider the end and object of your prayers, I can well say that you almost always receive that for which you pray. Here you must remember that God often hears us without our knowledge. You pray, for instance, for fine weather, and it continues to rain; you pray for rain, and the dry spell still keeps on. Then you are under the impression that your prayer is not heard; but you are wrong. Why so? When you prayed for rain or fine weather, your reasoning will had no other object but a good harvest, and by its means the comfortable support of yourself and family. God does not give you the rain or fine weather you ask; but he either increases your income, or else saves you from some misfortune which would have done much harm to your prospects, or else he bestows a blessing on your business; in a word, in spite of the persistent drought or rain, you are well provided for, and that was your object. Thus your prayer is heard as far as its end and aim is concerned. You beg to be freed from some troublesome temptation, and you are tempted more frequently than before. You say again, God does not hear me. And again you are wrong. Why so? The object of your reasonable wish was not, surely, that you should be deprived of merit, but that you might be saved from sin: God does not free you from the temptation, but he strengthens you with his special grace, so that you do not fall into sin. Thus your prayer is heard; and the same is to be said of everything we ask from God. He acts with us as he acted with St. Paul, who asked to be delivered from the stimulus of the flesh, instead of delivering him from it, he said: "My grace sufficeth." So that it is and remains true that he who prays will certainly receive more than what he asks for.

How do most Christians spend the day? Christ warns us "that

we ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18: 1). Pray always, indeed! In the morning they awake, and their heads are at once filled with thoughts of what they have to do during the day; they do not kneel down, they say no prayer; hardly are they dressed, when, without a blessing, they go to their different occupations, and that generally without a supernatural intention, without a thought of their last end, or of God and his holy will. In the evening they think only of retiring to rest. Thus most of their days are begun, passed, and ended without prayer, without merit; thus they spend whole years, until at last they find themselves poor and meritless at the door of eternity, when they will hear the words, "Time shall be no longer;" the time of meriting is at an end. Meanwhile we do not cast a thought on the immense treasure of graces we have foolishly lost, that we might easily have gained every day.

We are assured by God that we shall always receive; therefore we ought to pray always. Only come to me, he says. Ask and you shall receive. The oftener the better. Pray without ceasing, without intermission. You will never tire me, never trouble me with your importunity in knocking at my door, never exhaust my treasures. "Hitherto you have not asked anything" (John 16: 24). Ask, then. Hear how he himself is more eager in begging us to pray to him, more desirous so to speak of bestowing his gifts on us, than we are to ask for or to receive them.

And now I imagine I hear many people crying out: Alas, how unfortunate our condition! While Religious in their convents having nothing to do but to pray and praise God, we have to look after our domestic affairs and to labor and run about here and there the whole day, so that we have no time to pray. In the evening we are so tired that we can only say a few prayers and hurry to bed. My good people! I see well that you do not know what prayer is. It would indeed be an unfortunate thing for you if you could only pray, as you say, twice a day. But in reality you have time enough for prayer if you wish. If praying consisted only in going to church, or moving the lips while holding the book

or the beads in the hand, then you would have cause for complaint. St. Paul knew well that you must look after your households and your work; he exhorts the heads of families to do so, and tells servants that they must obey their masters with all diligence; and yet he says to all without exception: "Pray without ceasing." He knew well that work and daily domestic duties do not allow people to spend much time on their knees or with their prayer-books. No, prayer does not consist in that alone; nothing can prevent you from praying always, neither time, nor place, nor state, nor occupation, nor care, nor labor, nor sickness, nor weakness. God does not require your voice or your words, or that your knees should be always bent, or your hands stretched out. "Prayer is an elevation of the soul to God;" it is a thought, a pure intention directed to God. If you have this intention, everything will be a prayer. Therefore your work is prayer, your writing and studying is prayer, your buying and selling is prayer, your suffering and weeping is prayer, your standing and sitting is prayer, your eating and drinking is prayer, nay, even your recreation is a prayer, if all these things are done in the state of grace with a supernatural intention directed to God. See how easy it is to pray always; how easy to increase unceasingly sanctifying grace and thereby our reward in heaven; and that immense treasure is wantonly forfeited when we forget the good intention and do not direct our thoughts to God during our actions.

Moreover, the best and most useful kind of prayer, and that which is most pleasing to God, is the prayer called ejaculation, by which we frequently send up our petitions to God in a few words, or even by a mere thought, without moving the lips at all. There are many ejaculatory prayers you can use at different times according to the different circumstances you are in, or the wants you wish to have supplied. Thus you can make a short act of faith, of hope, of charity, of sorrow for sin, and renew the good intention. For instance, during your work you can say or think frequently: For thy sake, O God, I do this, and because it is thy will. In trouble or suffering: Lord, thy will be done! O my

God, I have deserved this ! In temptations and dangers of sin : Lord, come to my aid, do not abandon me ! My God, I love thee above all things ! At meal-times : I thank thee, O Lord ! While dressing : Clothe me, O Lord, with thy grace ! The Lord's prayer contains seven short ejaculations that are suited to every circumstance in which we can be situated. If you wish to awake confidence in God, let your prayer be : Our Father who art in heaven. If you wish to praise and bless God : Hallowed be thy name. If misfortune oppress you : Thy kingdom come. If trials are bearing heavily on you, sigh forth to God : Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. If you are poor and needy : Give us this day our daily bread. If you have been offended by others and excited to anger, say to God ; Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. If you are assailed by temptation : Lead us not into temptation. If you are troubled at the approach of misfortune : Deliver us from evil.

Prayer of that kind like an arrow pierces the clouds and ascends to heaven, and often brings more merit to our souls than half a bookful of prayers that we say without proper devotion. In books we find the affections of others, namely those which occurred to the person who wrote them, and there is many a one who does not understand what he reads, or is not in earnest about what he is asking with his lips. Therefore St. Augustine says : "There are many who speak to God, few who pray to him." But those ejaculations come from the very depths of the heart, and are sent forth to God by an earnest will and sincere affection. We know by experience that when praying from a book we are exposed to a thousand distractions, so that at the end we often do not know what we have been praying for, or what we desire from God. There is no room for such distractions in ejaculations, so that by their means we can keep constantly in the presence of God ; the soul becomes familiar with him, always keeps up a friendly conversation with him, and drinks deep at the fountain of his graces. That is the way to pray without ceasing ; that is the way to receive without ceasing.

Sinners, alas, how I pity you! You cannot hope to profit by this as long as you are enemies of God; therefore repent and get out of that miserable state as soon as possible by true penance. But do not abandon prayer even while you are in sin; for if you do not merit thereby an increase of sanctifying grace, which is impossible, as you have totally lost grace by mortal sin, yet you will receive something, and your prayers will not be fruitless. If you consider your state as sinners, you will find that it is indeed a sad thing for you to be in want of everything, and to have to beg everything from that God who is your enemy, and to dare to call upon that God for help even while you are opposed to him. Yet it would be the worst of all mistakes to give up prayer because you are in the state of sin. For there is no better or speedier means of freeing yourselves from sin than to fly to God by prayer. If you neglect that means, you will fall from one sin into another, and will continue in sin until you despair of ever being forgiven. God is ready to hear you; you need no advocate nor outlay of money to be well received by him; he himself invites you to come and ask him to forgive you. Cease from sin, shed tears of penance, and then go to him. For you are not as desirous to be forgiven as he is to forgive. Pray, then, but first of all for true sorrow and repentance for your sins. Often say with the public sinner: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." By means of fervent aspirations often repeated you will obtain the grace of conversion.

Thus it is true, that when we pray we always receive from God; and no man's prayer is ever fruitless. One of two things we may be certain of much better for us. Why, then have we been so remiss in prayer hitherto,and so foolishly lost thousands of eternities of glory! We may have been punctual in saying our daily prayers, but what is that after all? How coldly, slothfully, distractedly we have said them, without fervor, spirit, earnestness, or relish! in future, then, let us be more diligent, more fervent in prayer, and make the best use of such an easy means of enriching our souls. Amen.

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Short Sermons Vol. III - The

TITLE

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